Theodor de Bry, *Negotiating Peace with the Indians*, 1634. Virginia Historical Society.

# 2

# Colliding Cultures

## I. Introduction

The Columbian Exchange transformed both sides of the Atlantic, but with dramatically disparate outcomes. New diseases wiped out entire civilizations in the Americas, while newly imported nutrient-rich foodstuffs enabled a European population boom. Spain benefited most immediately as the wealth of the Aztec and Incan Empires strengthened the Spanish monarchy. Spain used its new riches to gain an advantage over other European nations, but this advantage was soon contested.

Portugal, France, the Netherlands, and England all raced to the New World, eager to match the gains of the Spanish. Native peoples greeted the new visitors with responses ranging from welcoming cooperation to aggressive violence, but the ravages of disease and the possibility of new trading relationships enabled Europeans to create settlements all along the western rim of the Atlantic world. New empires would emerge from

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these tenuous beginnings, and by the end of the seventeenth century, Spain would lose its privileged position to its rivals. An age of colonization had begun and, with it, a great collision of cultures commenced.

## II. Spanish America

Spain extended its reach in the Americas after reaping the benefits of its colonies in Mexico, the Caribbean, and South America. Expeditions slowly began combing the continent and bringing Europeans into the modern-day United States in the hopes of establishing religious and economic dominance in a new territory.

Juan Ponce de León arrived in the area named La Florida in 1513. He found between 150,000 and 300,000 Native Americans. But then two and a half centuries of contact with European and African peoples—whether through war, slave raids, or, most dramatically, foreign disease—decimated Florida's indigenous population. European explorers, meanwhile, had hoped to find great wealth in Florida, but reality never aligned with their imaginations.

In the first half of the sixteenth century, Spanish colonizers fought frequently with Florida's Native peoples as well as with other Europeans. In the 1560s Spain expelled French Protestants, called Huguenots, from the


1513 Atlantic map from cartographer Martin Waldseemuller. Wikimedia.

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area near modern-day Jacksonville in northeast Florida. In 1586 English privateer Sir Francis Drake burned the wooden settlement of St. Augustine. At the dawn of the seventeenth century, Spain's reach in Florida extended from the mouth of the St. Johns River south to the environs of St. Augustine—an area of roughly 1,000 square miles. The Spaniards attempted to duplicate methods for establishing control used previously in Mexico, the Caribbean, and the Andes. The Crown granted missionaries the right to live among Timucua and Guale villagers in the late 1500s and early 1600s and encouraged settlement through the *encomienda* system (grants of Indian labor).[1]

In the 1630s, the mission system extended into the Apalachee district in the Florida panhandle. The Apalachee, one of the most powerful tribes in Florida at the time of contact, claimed the territory from the modern Florida-Georgia border to the Gulf of Mexico. Apalachee farmers grew an abundance of corn and other crops. Indian traders carried surplus products east along the Camino Real (the royal road) that connected the western anchor of the mission system with St. Augustine. Spanish settlers drove cattle eastward across the St. Johns River and established ranches as far west as Apalachee. Still, Spain held Florida tenuously.

Farther west, in 1598, Juan de Oñate led four hundred settlers, soldiers, and missionaries from Mexico into New Mexico. The Spanish Southwest had brutal beginnings. When Oñate sacked the Pueblo city of Acoma, the "sky city," the Spaniards slaughtered nearly half of its roughly 1,500 inhabitants, including women and children. Oñate ordered one foot cut off every surviving male over age fifteen, and he enslaved the remaining women and children.[2]

Santa Fe, the first permanent European settlement in the Southwest, was established in 1610. Few Spaniards relocated to the Southwest because of the distance from Mexico City and the dry and hostile environment. Thus, the Spanish never achieved a commanding presence in the region. By 1680, only about three thousand colonists called Spanish New Mexico home.[3] There, they traded with and exploited the local Puebloan peoples. The region's Puebloan population had plummeted from as many as sixty thousand in 1600 to about seventeen thousand in 1680.[4]

Spain shifted strategies after the military expeditions wove their way through the southern and western half of North America. Missions became the engine of colonization in North America. Missionaries, most of whom were members of the Franciscan religious order, provided Spain with an advance guard in North America. Catholicism had always justi-

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fied Spanish conquest, and colonization always carried religious imperatives. By the early seventeenth century, Spanish friars had established dozens of missions along the Rio Grande and in California.

## III. Spain's Rivals Emerge

While Spain plundered the New World, unrest plagued Europe. The Reformation threw England and France, the two European powers capable of contesting Spain, into turmoil. Long and expensive conflicts drained time, resources, and lives. Millions died from religious violence in France alone. As the violence diminished in Europe, however, religious and political rivalries continued in the New World.

The Spanish exploitation of New Spain's riches inspired European monarchs to invest in exploration and conquest. Reports of Spanish atrocities spread throughout Europe and provided a humanitarian justification for European colonization. An English reprint of the writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas bore the sensational title "Popery Truly Display'd in its Bloody Colours: Or, a Faithful Narrative of the Horrid and Unexampled Massacres, Butcheries, and all manners of Cruelties that Hell and Malice could invent, committed by the Popish Spanish." An English writer


The earliest plan of New Amsterdam (now Manhattan), 1660. Wikimedia.

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explained that the Indians "were simple and plain men, and lived without great labour," but in their lust for gold the Spaniards "forced the people (that were not used to labour) to stand all the daie in the hot sun gathering gold in the sand of the rivers. By this means a great number of them (not used to such pains) died, and a great number of them (seeing themselves brought from so quiet a life to such misery and slavery) of desperation killed themselves. And many would not marry, because they would not have their children slaves to the Spaniards."[5] The Spanish accused their critics of fostering a "Black Legend." The Black Legend drew on religious differences and political rivalries. Spain had successful conquests in France, Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands and left many in those nations yearning to break free from Spanish influence. English writers argued that Spanish barbarities were foiling a tremendous opportunity for the expansion of Christianity across the globe and that a benevolent conquest of the New World by non-Spanish monarchies offered the surest salvation of the New World's pagan masses. With these religious justifications, and with obvious economic motives, Spain's rivals arrived in the New World.

### THE FRENCH

The French crown subsidized exploration in the early sixteenth century. Early French explorers sought a fabled Northwest Passage, a mythical waterway passing through the North American continent to Asia. Despite the wealth of the New World, Asia's riches still beckoned to Europeans. Canada's St. Lawrence River appeared to be such a passage, stretching deep into the continent and into the Great Lakes. French colonial possessions centered on these bodies of water (and, later, down the Mississippi River to the port of New Orleans).

French colonization developed through investment from private trading companies. Traders established Port Royal in Acadia (Nova Scotia) in 1603 and launched trading expeditions that stretched down the Atlantic coast as far as Cape Cod. The needs of the fur trade set the future pattern of French colonization. Founded in 1608 under the leadership of Samuel de Champlain, Quebec provided the foothold for what would become New France. French fur traders placed a higher value on cooperating with the Indians than on establishing a successful French colonial footprint. Asserting dominance in the region could have been to their own detriment, as it might have compromised their access to skilled Indian trappers, and therefore wealth. Few Frenchmen traveled to the New World to settle permanently. In fact, few traveled at all. Many per-

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This depiction of New Orleans in 1726 when it was an eight-year-old French frontier settlement. Jean-Pierre Lassus, *Veüe et Perspective de la Nouvelle Orleans*, 1726, Centre des archives d'outre-mer, France. Wikimedia.

secuted French Protestants (Huguenots) sought to emigrate after France criminalized Protestantism in 1685, but all non-Catholics were forbidden in New France.[6]

The French preference for trade over permanent settlement fostered more cooperative and mutually beneficial relationships with Native Americans than was typical among the Spanish and English. Perhaps eager to debunk the anti-Catholic elements of the Black Legend, the French worked to cultivate cooperation with Indians. Jesuit missionaries, for instance, adopted different conversion strategies than the Spanish Franciscans. Spanish missionaries brought Indians into enclosed missions, whereas Jesuits more often lived with or alongside Indian groups. Many French fur traders married Indian women.[7] The offspring of Indian women and French men were so common in New France that the French developed a word for these children, *Métis(sage)*. The Huron people developed a particularly close relationship with the French, and many converted to Christianity and engaged in the fur trade. But close relationships with the French would come at a high cost. The Huron were decimated by the ravages of European disease, and entanglements in French and Dutch conflicts proved disastrous.[8] Despite this, some Native peoples maintained alliances with the French.

Pressure from the powerful Iroquois in the East pushed many Algonquian-speaking peoples toward French territory in the midseventeenth century, and together they crafted what historians have called a "middle ground," a kind of cross-cultural space that allowed for native and European interaction, negotiation, and accommodation. French traders adopted—sometimes clumsily—the gift-giving and mediation strategies expected of Native leaders. Natives similarly engaged the impersonal European market and adapted—often haphazardly—to European laws. The Great Lakes "middle ground" experienced tumultuous

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success throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries until English colonial officials and American settlers swarmed the region. The pressures of European expansion strained even the closest bonds.[9]

### THE DUTCH

The Netherlands, a small maritime nation with great wealth, achieved considerable colonial success. In 1581, the Netherlands had officially broken away from the Hapsburgs and won a reputation as the freest of the new European nations. Dutch women maintained separate legal identities from their husbands and could therefore hold property and inherit full estates.

Ravaged by the turmoil of the Reformation, the Dutch embraced greater religious tolerance and freedom of the press than other European nations.[10] Radical Protestants, Catholics, and Jews flocked to the Netherlands. The English Pilgrims, for instance, fled first to the Netherlands before sailing to the New World years later. The Netherlands built its colonial empire through the work of experienced merchants and skilled sailors. The Dutch were the most advanced capitalists in the modern world and marshaled extensive financial resources by creating innovative financial organizations such as the Amsterdam Stock Exchange and the East India Company. Although the Dutch offered liberties, they offered very little democracy—power remained in the hands of only a few. And Dutch liberties certainly had their limits. The Dutch advanced the slave trade and brought African slaves with them to the New World. Slavery was an essential part of Dutch capitalist triumphs.

Sharing the European hunger for access to Asia, in 1609 the Dutch commissioned the Englishman Henry Hudson to discover the fabled Northwest Passage through North America. He failed, of course, but nevertheless found the Hudson River and claimed modern-day New York for the Dutch. There they established New Netherland, an essential part of the Dutch New World empire. The Netherlands chartered the Dutch West India Company in 1621 and established colonies in Africa, the Caribbean, and North America. The island of Manhattan provided a launching pad to support its Caribbean colonies and attack Spanish trade.

Spiteful of the Spanish and mindful of the Black Legend, the Dutch were determined not to repeat Spanish atrocities. They fashioned guidelines for New Netherland that conformed to the ideas of Hugo Grotius, a legal philosopher who believed that Native peoples possessed the

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same natural rights as Europeans. Colony leaders insisted that land be purchased; in 1626 Peter Minuit therefore "bought" Manhattan from Munsee Indians.[11] Despite the seemingly honorable intentions, it is likely the Dutch paid the wrong Indians for the land (either intentionally or unintentionally) or that the Munsee and the Dutch understood the transaction in very different terms. Transactions like these illustrated both the Dutch attempt to find a more peaceful process of colonization and the inconsistency between European and Native American understandings of property.

Like the French, the Dutch sought to profit, not to conquer. Trade with Native peoples became New Netherland's central economic activity. Dutch traders carried wampum along Native trade routes and exchanged it for beaver pelts. Wampum consisted of shell beads fashioned by Algonquian Indians on the southern New England coast and was valued as a ceremonial and diplomatic commodity among the Iroquois. Wampum became a currency that could buy anything from a loaf of bread to a plot of land.[12]

In addition to developing these trading networks, the Dutch also established farms, settlements, and lumber camps. The West India Company directors implemented the patroon system to encourage colonization. The patroon system granted large estates to wealthy landlords, who subsequently paid passage for the tenants to work their land. Expanding Dutch settlements correlated with deteriorating relations with local Indians. In the interior of the continent, the Dutch retained valuable alliances with the Iroquois to maintain Beverwijck, modern-day Albany, as a hub for the fur trade.[13] In the places where the Dutch built permanent settlements, the ideals of peaceful colonization succumbed to the settlers' increasing demand for land. Armed conflicts erupted as colonial settlements encroached on Native villages and hunting lands. Profit and peace, it seemed, could not coexist.

Labor shortages, meanwhile, crippled Dutch colonization. The patroon system failed to bring enough tenants, and the colony could not attract a sufficient number of indentured servants to satisfy the colony's backers. In response, the colony imported eleven company-owned slaves in 1626, the same year that Minuit purchased Manhattan. Slaves were tasked with building New Amsterdam (modern-day New York City), including a defensive wall along the northern edge of the colony (the site of modern-day Wall Street). They created its roads and maintained its all-important port. Fears of racial mixing led the Dutch to import enslaved

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women, enabling the formation of African Dutch families. The colony's first African marriage occurred in 1641, and by 1650 there were at least five hundred African slaves in the colony. By 1660, New Amsterdam had the largest urban slave population on the continent.[14]

As was typical of the practice of African slavery in much of the early seventeenth century, Dutch slavery in New Amsterdam was less comprehensively exploitative than later systems of American slavery. Some enslaved Africans, for instance, successfully sued for back wages. When several company-owned slaves fought for the colony against the Munsee Indians, they petitioned for their freedom and won a kind of "half freedom" that allowed them to work their own land in return for paying a large tithe, or tax, to their masters. The children of these "half-free" laborers remained held in bondage by the West India Company, however. The Dutch, who so proudly touted their liberties, grappled with the reality of African slavery, and some New Netherlanders protested the enslavement of Christianized Africans. The economic goals of the colony slowly crowded out these cultural and religious objections, and the much-boasted liberties of the Dutch came to exist alongside increasingly brutal systems of slavery.

### THE PORTUGUESE

The Portuguese had been leaders in Atlantic navigation well ahead of Columbus's voyage. But the incredible wealth flowing from New Spain piqued the rivalry between the two Iberian countries, and accelerated Portuguese colonization efforts. This rivalry created a crisis within the Catholic world as Spain and Portugal squared off in a battle for colonial supremacy. The pope intervened and divided the New World with the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494. Land east of the Tordesillas Meridian, an imaginary line dividing South America, would be given to Portugal, whereas land west of the line was reserved for Spanish conquest. In return for the license to conquer, both Portugal and Spain were instructed to treat the natives with Christian compassion and to bring them under the protection of the Church.

Lucrative colonies in Africa and India initially preoccupied Portugal, but by 1530 the Portuguese turned their attention to the land that would become Brazil, driving out French traders and establishing permanent settlements. Gold and silver mines dotted the interior of the colony, but two industries powered early colonial Brazil: sugar and the slave trade. In fact, over the entire history of the Atlantic slave trade, more Africans

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were enslaved in Brazil than in any other colony in the Atlantic World. Gold mines emerged in greater numbers throughout the eighteenth century but still never rivaled the profitability of sugar or slave trading.

Jesuit missionaries brought Christianity to Brazil, but strong elements of African and Native spirituality mixed with orthodox Catholicism to create a unique religious culture. This culture resulted from the demographics of Brazilian slavery. High mortality rates on sugar plantations required a steady influx of new slaves, thus perpetuating the cultural connection between Brazil and Africa. The reliance on new imports of slaves increased the likelihood of resistance, however, and escaped slaves managed to create several free settlements, called *quilombos*. These settlements drew from both African and Native slaves, and despite frequent attacks, several endured throughout the long history of Brazilian slavery.[15]

Despite the arrival of these new Europeans, Spain continued to dominate the New World. The wealth flowing from the exploitation of the Aztec and Incan Empires greatly eclipsed the profits of other European nations. But this dominance would not last long. By the end of the sixteenth century, the powerful Spanish Armada would be destroyed, and the English would begin to rule the waves.

## IV. English Colonization

Spain had a one-hundred-year head start on New World colonization, and a jealous England eyed the enormous wealth that Spain gleaned. The Protestant Reformation had shaken England, but Elizabeth I assumed the English crown in 1558. Elizabeth oversaw England's so-called golden age, which included both the expansion of trade and exploration and the literary achievements of Shakespeare and Marlowe. English mercantilism, a state-assisted manufacturing and trading system, created and maintained markets. The markets provided a steady supply of consumers and laborers, stimulated economic expansion, and increased English wealth.

However, wrenching social and economic changes unsettled the English population. The island's population increased from fewer than three million in 1500 to over five million by the middle of the seventeenth century.[16] The skyrocketing cost of land coincided with plummeting farming income. Rents and prices rose but wages stagnated. Moreover, movements to enclose public land—sparked by the transition of English

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Nicholas Hilliard, *The Battle of Gravelines*, 1588. Wikimedia.

landholders from agriculture to livestock raising—evicted tenants from the land and created hordes of landless, jobless peasants that haunted the cities and countryside. One quarter to one half of the population lived in extreme poverty.[17]

New World colonization won support in England amid a time of rising English fortunes among the wealthy, a tense Spanish rivalry, and mounting internal social unrest. But supporters of English colonization always touted more than economic gains and mere national self-interest. They claimed to be doing God's work. Many claimed that colonization would glorify God, England, and Protestantism by Christianizing the New World's pagan peoples. Advocates such as Richard Hakluyt the Younger and John Dee, for instance, drew upon *The History of the Kings of Britain*, written by the twelfth-century monk Geoffrey of Monmouth, and its mythical account of King Arthur's conquest and Christianization of pagan lands to justify American conquest.[18] Moreover, promoters promised that the conversion of New World Indians would satisfy God and glorify England's "Virgin Queen," Elizabeth I, who was seen

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as nearly divine by some in England. The English—and other European Protestant colonizers—imagined themselves superior to the Spanish, who still bore the Black Legend of inhuman cruelty. English colonization, supporters argued, would prove that superiority.

In his 1584 "Discourse on Western Planting," Richard Hakluyt amassed the supposed religious, moral, and exceptional economic benefits of colonization. He repeated the Black Legend of Spanish New World terrorism and attacked the sins of Catholic Spain. He promised that English colonization could strike a blow against Spanish heresy and bring Protestant religion to the New World. English interference, Hakluyt suggested, might provide the only salvation from Catholic rule in the New World. The New World, too, he said, offered obvious economic advantages. Trade and resource extraction would enrich the English treasury. England, for instance, could find plentiful materials to outfit a world-class navy. Moreover, he said, the New World could provide an escape for England's vast armies of landless "vagabonds." Expanded trade, he argued, would not only bring profit but also provide work for England's jobless poor. A Christian enterprise, a blow against Spain, an economic stimulus, and a social safety valve all beckoned the English toward a commitment to colonization.[19]

This noble rhetoric veiled the coarse economic motives that brought England to the New World. New economic structures and a new merchant class paved the way for colonization. England's merchants lacked estates, but they had new plans to build wealth. By collaborating with new government-sponsored trading monopolies and employing financial innovations such as joint-stock companies, England's merchants sought to improve on the Dutch economic system. Spain was extracting enormous material wealth from the New World; why shouldn't England? Joint-stock companies, the ancestors of modern corporations, became the initial instruments of colonization. With government monopolies, shared profits, and managed risks, these money-making ventures could attract and manage the vast capital needed for colonization. In 1606 James I approved the formation of the Virginia Company (named after Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen).

Rather than formal colonization, however, the most successful early English ventures in the New World were a form of state-sponsored piracy known as privateering. Queen Elizabeth sponsored sailors, or "Sea Dogges," such as John Hawkins and Francis Drake, to plunder Spanish ships and towns in the Americas. Privateers earned a substantial

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profit both for themselves and for the English crown. England practiced piracy on a scale, one historian wrote, "that transforms crime into politics."[20] Francis Drake harried Spanish ships throughout the Western Hemisphere and raided Spanish caravans as far away as the coast of Peru on the Pacific Ocean. In 1580 Elizabeth rewarded her skilled pirate with knighthood. But Elizabeth walked a fine line. With Protestant-Catholic tensions already running high, English privateering provoked Spain. Tensions worsened after the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, a Catholic. In 1588, King Philip II of Spain unleashed the fabled Armada. With 130 ships, 8,000 sailors, and 18,000 soldiers, Spain launched the largest invasion in history to destroy the British navy and depose Elizabeth.

An island nation, England depended on a robust navy for trade and territorial expansion. England had fewer ships than Spain, but they were smaller and swifter. They successfully harassed the armada, forcing it to retreat to the Netherlands for reinforcements. But then a fluke storm, celebrated in England as the "divine wind," annihilated the remainder of the fleet.[21] The destruction of the armada changed the course of world history. It not only saved England and secured English Protestantism, but it also opened the seas to English expansion and paved the way for England's colonial future. By 1600, England stood ready to embark on its dominance over North America.

English colonization would look very different from Spanish or French colonization. England had long been trying to conquer Catholic Ireland. Rather than integrating with the Irish and trying to convert them to Protestantism, England more often simply seized land through violence and pushed out the former inhabitants, leaving them to move elsewhere or to die. These same tactics would later be deployed in North American invasions.

English colonization, however, began haltingly. Sir Humphrey Gilbert labored throughout the late sixteenth century to establish a colony in Newfoundland but failed. In 1587, with a predominantly male cohort of 150 English colonizers, John White reestablished an abandoned settlement on North Carolina's Roanoke Island. Supply shortages prompted White to return to England for additional support, but the Spanish Armada and the mobilization of British naval efforts stranded him in Britain for several years. When he finally returned to Roanoke, he found the colony abandoned. What befell the failed colony? White found the word *Croatan* carved into a tree or a post in the abandoned colony. Historians

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presume the colonists, short of food, may have fled for a nearby island of that name and encountered its settled native population. Others offer violence as an explanation. Regardless, the English colonists were never heard from again. When Queen Elizabeth died in 1603, no Englishmen had yet established a permanent North American colony.

After King James made peace with Spain in 1604, privateering no longer held out the promise of cheap wealth. Colonization assumed a new urgency. The Virginia Company, established in 1606, drew inspiration from Cortés and the Spanish conquests. It hoped to find gold and silver as well as other valuable trading commodities in the New World: glass, iron, furs, pitch, tar, and anything else the country could supply. The company planned to identify a navigable river with a deep harbor, away from the eyes of the Spanish. There they would find an Indian trading network and extract a fortune from the New World.

## V. Jamestown

In April 1607 Englishmen aboard three ships—the *Susan Constant*, the *Godspeed*, and the *Discovery*—sailed forty miles up the James River (named for the English king) in present-day Virginia (named for Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen) and settled on just such a place. The uninhabited peninsula they selected was upriver and out of sight of Spanish patrols. It offered easy defense against ground assaults and was both

*Incolarum Virginiae piscandi ratio* (*The Method of Fishing of the Inhabitants of Virginia*), c. 1590. *The Encyclopedia Virginia*.

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