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English Settlement of the Chesapeake

Models of Settlement – The major European colonizers, France, Spain and England had different models or methods of settling the New World.

The French sent very few people, perhaps as few as 10,000 French actually migrated to America, though the real number probably is closer to 50,000. The French initially settled in New France (Canada and the Upper Mid-West) and eventually traveled south on the Mississippi River. The main commodities were furs supplied by Native Americans.

The Spanish sent more people to the Americas, mainly South and Central America and the Caribbean. Initially the Spanish exploited native labor in mining and eventually on plantations. Perhaps 250,000 Spaniards settled the New World from 1500 to 1800.

The English pattern was different from the French and Spanish. The English sent people, a lot of people. During the 18th Century at least 300,000 English settled along the East Coast of British North America and in the Caribbean.

Preparing to Colonize

English Reformation – Poor Henry VIII! He hoped for a male heir, suspecting that only a male child would be strong enough to rule England and avoid a possible revolt by other claimants to the English throne. His wife, the Spanish Catherine of Aragon, did not have any male children and so he decided to seek an annulment. Typically, the pope would grant a good Catholic King a decree. Under the circumstances, though, the pope, Clement VII was under the control of Catherine's close relative, the Emperor Charles V. Clement refused Henry's request and Henry severed his ties with the Roman Catholic Church and established himself as the head of the Anglican Church. His first action, of course, was to divorce Catherine and send her packing to a convent (she was one of the lucky ones). Additionally, the Catholic Church was a large landholder in England, and Henry's Reformation allowed him, as Monarch and Church leader, to secure this wealth.

The Anglican Church outwardly still appeared very Catholic, though. Henry married several times over and failed to produce the son he wanted. The irony is that one of his daughters, Elizabeth I, would reign over England's great period of expansion and growing strength. In the eyes of the Catholic Church in Rome, she was illegitimate and she responded by moving the Anglican Church towards a more Protestant orientation.

What's the point? For a thousand of years, peoples' lives revolved around the Catholic Church's influence. After the Protestant Reformation a sense of

liberation spurred innovation across a broad spectrum. People would be more willing to take risks that might make their lives better.

Conflict with Spain – England sensed an opportunity to increase its position as a world power by plundering Spanish fleets that transported Gold and Silver from the New World. Interestingly, these raids were portrayed as investment opportunities. For example, Sir Francis Drake secured investments to fit out a privateer ship, The Golden Hind, and after a series of raids against Spanish outposts in America netted a 4700% profit (better than a dot.com!). These attacks led to Spain's effort in 1588 to invade England. The great armada, however, suffered from English attacks and bad weather and failed in its goal. This defeat altered the balance of power in Europe and opened the door for British colonization in North America.

Some prominent English actively called for colonization. Richard Hakluyt, who never ventured outside of England, was a strong proponent and argued that strong nations had colonies that provided opportunities for profit, glory, and religious missions.

Population pressure – between 1500 and 1600 England's population doubled from 2 million to 4 million people. At the same time large landholders began to enclose fields and shift from agriculture to sheep herding. The impact of both these events created social havoc as unemployed people flooded urban areas. This created a dangerous class willing, perhaps, to challenge the ruling class. Colonization would relieve this population pressure.

Business innovation – At the same time as these above events were taking place, business innovations helped smooth the way for colonization. Companies began to pool stockholders capital to spread the risk of funding colonization efforts. For example, the Muscovy Company (1555) sought trade in Russia and the Baltic, The Levant Company (1581) formed to trade in the Middle East, and the East India Company (1600) sought opportunities to trade in Asia and India.

Ireland - After the mid-1500s England, though it claimed Ireland for centuries, actually asserted these claims. Ireland became a test ground for colonization. The experience was extremely brutal and provided "experience" for British interaction with Native Americans in later decades.

Colonizing the Chesapeake

As early as 1578 those who had colonized Ireland, particularly Humphery Gilbert and Walter Raleigh, received permission from Elizabeth I to colonize America.

Attempts to colonize Virginia in 1585 and 1587 were utter failures.

Later, two companies formed – the Virginia Company of Plymouth and the Virginia Company of London – to colonize America. Both sought to profit from gold, silver, timber and furs.

The Virginia Company of London settled Jamestown in 1607. Unfortunately, the settlers recruited were lazy and not willing to work. Their background should have made apparent. They were largely the second, third and fourth sons of the English gentry (elites). In England, at the time, only the oldest son inherited the father's wealth. This kept the family strong by keeping land and other wealth consolidated, rather than weakening the family by diffusing the wealth. Good for number one son, bad for the rest, who would have to depend on the older brother for an allowance or find a different occupation, often in the religious orders or in the military. Colonization offered the hope for younger sons to set themselves up. However, they didn't have the skills needed to settle a new land.

Chaos reigned in early Jamestown, most settlers died of disease or starvation. Of the first 104, only 38 survived and of the next 325 only 100 lived.

John Smith took over the settlement and declared martial law. "He that will not work, shall not eat" was the rule. The colonists were offended by Smith's dictatorial style and he eventually left the colony. Again, starvation returned and at least one settler cannibalized his own wife! (Smith, upon hearing this, referred to this as powdered wife).

The English applied their Irish experience to the Native Americans and warred on the local tribe.

Recall, the point of settlement is to turn a profit. This clearly wasn't happening and investors were increasingly distressed. In 1619, three reforms were instituted to enhance potential profits:

Headright system in which every settler received 50 acres of land. Perhaps property ownership would inspire a work ethic!

Hundreds – Wealthy settlers could secure land to establish towns.

Self-Government

In reality, the English were not very good colonizers initially. They refused to work and attacked the local tribes.



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