

# 2

## CHAPTER

# American Experiments 1521–1700

### SPAIN'S TRIBUTE COLONIES

- A New American World
- The Columbian Exchange
- The Protestant Challenge to Spain

### PLANTATION COLONIES

- Brazil's Sugar Plantations
- England's Tobacco Colonies
- The Caribbean Islands
- Plantation Life

### NEO-EUROPEAN COLONIES

- New France
- New Netherland
- The Rise of the Iroquois
- New England

### INSTABILITY, WAR, AND REBELLION

- New England's Indian Wars
- Bacon's Rebellion, 1675–1676

Beginning in the 1660s, legislators in Virginia and Maryland hammered out the legal definition of **chattel slavery**: the ownership of human beings as property. The institution of slavery — which would profoundly affect African Americans and shape much of American history — had been obsolete in England for centuries, and articulating its logic required lawmakers to reverse some of the most basic presumptions of English law. For example, in 1662 a Virginia statute declared, “all children borne in this country shalbe held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother.” This idea — that a child’s legal status derived from the mother, rather than the father — ran contrary to the patriarchal foundations of English law. The men who sat in Virginia’s House of Burgesses would not propose such a thing lightly. Why would they decide that the principle of patriarchal descent, which was so fundamental to their own worlds, was inappropriate for their slaves?

The question needed to be addressed, according to the statute’s preamble, since “doubts have arisen whether children got by an Englishman upon a negro woman should be slave or free.” One such case involved Elizabeth Key, a woman whose father was a free Englishman and mother was an African slave. She petitioned for her freedom in 1656, based on her father’s status. Her lawyer was an Englishman named William Greensted. He not only took Key’s case, but he also fathered two of her children and, eventually, married her. Key won her case and her freedom from bondage. Elizabeth Key escaped her mother’s fate — a life in slavery — because her father and her husband were both free Englishmen. The 1662 statute aimed to close Key’s avenue to freedom.

The process by which the institution of chattel slavery was molded to the needs of colonial planters is just one example of the way Europeans adapted the principles they brought with them to the unfamiliar demands of their new surroundings. In the showdown between people like Elizabeth Key and William Greensted, on the one hand, and the members of Virginia’s House of Burgesses on the other, we see how people in disorienting circumstances — some in positions in power, others in various states of subjection to their social and political superiors — scrambled to make sense of their world and bend its rules to their advantage. Through countless contests of power and authority like this one, the outlines of a new world gradually began to emerge from the collision of cultures.

By 1700, three distinct types of colonies had developed in the Americas: the tribute colonies created in Mexico and Peru, which relied initially on the wealth and labor of indigenous peoples; plantation colonies, where sugar and other tropical and subtropical crops could be produced with bound labor; and **neo-Europes**, where colonists sought to replicate, or at least approximate, economies and social structures they knew at home.

### IDENTIFY THE BIG IDEA

In what ways did European migrants transfer familiar patterns and institutions to their colonies in the Americas, and in what ways did they create new American worlds? How did Native Americans adapt to the growing presence of Europeans among them?



**Power and Race in the Chesapeake** In this 1670 painting by Gerard Soest, proprietor Lord Baltimore holds a map of Maryland, the colony he owned and which would soon belong to his grandson Cecil Calvert, shown in the painting as already grasping his magnificent inheritance. The presence of a young African servant foretells the importance of slave labor in the post-1700 economy of the Chesapeake colonies. Enoch Pratt Free Library, Maryland's State Library Resource Center. All Rights reserved.

## Spain's Tribute Colonies

European interest in the Americas took shape under the influence of Spain's conquest of the Aztec and Inca empires. There, Spanish colonizers capitalized on pre-existing systems of tribute and labor discipline to tap the enormous wealth of Mesoamerica and the Andes. Once native rulers were overthrown, the Spanish monarchs transferred their institutions—municipal councils, the legal code, the Catholic Church—to America; the empire was centrally controlled to protect the crown's immensely valuable holdings. The Spanish conquest also set in motion a global ecological transformation through a vast intercontinental movement of plants, animals, and diseases that historians call the Columbian Exchange. And the conquest triggered hostile responses from Spain's European rivals, especially the Protestant Dutch and English (Figure 2.1).

## A New American World

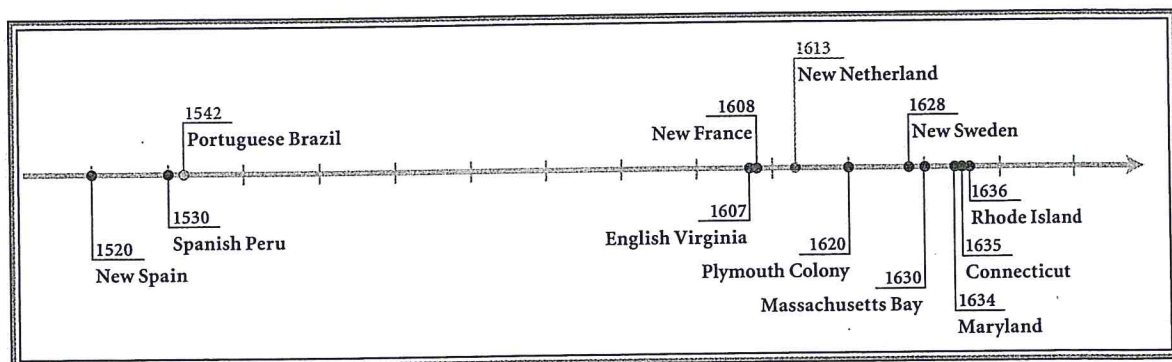
After Cortés toppled Moctezuma and Pizarro defeated Atahualpa (see pages 34–35), leading conquistadors received *encomiendas* from the crown, which allowed them to claim tribute in labor and goods from Indian communities. Later these grants were repartitioned, but the pattern was set early: prominent men controlled vast resources and monopolized Indian labor. The value of these grants was dramatically enhanced by the discovery of gold and, especially, silver deposits in both Mexico and the Andes. In the decades after the conquest, mines were developed in Zacatecas, in Guanajuato, and—most famously—at Potosí, high in the Andes. Spanish officials co-opted the *mita* system, which made laborers available to the Inca Empire, to force Indian workers into the mines. At its peak, Potosí

alone produced 200 tons of silver per year, accounting for half the world's supply.

The two great indigenous empires of the Americas thus became the core of an astonishingly wealthy European empire. Vast amounts of silver poured across the Pacific Ocean to China, where it was minted into money; in exchange, Spain received valuable Chinese silks, spices, and ceramics. In Europe, the gold that had formerly honored Aztec and Inca gods now flowed into the countinghouses of Spain and gilded the Catholic churches of Europe. The Spanish crown benefitted enormously from all this wealth—at least initially. In the long run, it triggered ruinous inflation. As a French traveler noted in 1603: "Everything is dear [expensive] in Spain, except silver."

A new society took shape on the conquered lands. Between 1500 and 1650, at least 350,000 Spaniards migrated to Mesoamerica and the Andes. About two-thirds were males drawn from a cross section of Spanish society, many of them skilled tradesmen. Also arriving were 250,000–300,000 Africans. Racial mixture was widespread, and such groups as mestizos (Spaniard-Indian) and mulattos (Spaniard-African) grew rapidly. Zambo (Indian-African) populations developed gradually as well. Over time, a system of increasingly complex racial categories developed—the "casta system"—buttressed by a legal code that differentiated among the principal groups.

Indians were always in the majority in Mexico and Peru, but profound changes came as their numbers declined and peoples of Spanish and mixed-race descent grew in number. Spaniards initially congregated in cities, but gradually they moved into the countryside, creating large estates (known as haciendas) and regional networks of market exchange. Most Indians remained in their native communities, under the authority of native rulers and speaking native



**FIGURE 2.1**  
Chronology of European Colonies in the Americas

languages. However, Spanish priests suppressed religious ceremonies and texts and converted natives to Christianity *en masse*. Catholicism was transformed in the process: Catholic parishes took their form from Indian communities; indigenous ideas and expectations reshaped Church practices; and new forms of Native American Christianity emerged in both regions.

## The Columbian Exchange

The Spanish invasion permanently altered the natural as well as the human environment. Smallpox, influenza, measles, yellow fever, and other silent killers carried from Europe and Africa ravaged Indian communities, whose inhabitants had never encountered these diseases before and thus had no immunity to them. In the densely populated core areas, populations declined by 90 percent or more in the first century of contact with Europeans. On islands and in the tropical lowlands, the toll was even heavier; native populations were often wiped out altogether. Syphilis was the only significant illness that traveled in the opposite direction: Columbus's sailors carried a virulent strain of the sexually transmitted disease back to Europe with them.

The movement of diseases and peoples across the Atlantic was part of a larger pattern of biological transformation that historians call the **Columbian Exchange** (Map 2.1). Foods of the Western Hemisphere—especially maize, potatoes, manioc, sweet potatoes, and tomatoes—

significantly increased agricultural yields and population growth in other continents. Maize and potatoes, for example, reached China around 1700; in the following century, the Chinese population tripled from 100 million to 300 million. At the same time, many animals, plants, and germs were carried to the Americas. European livestock transformed American landscapes. While Native Americans domesticated very few animals—dogs and llamas were the principal exceptions—Europeans brought an enormous Old World bestiary to the Americas, including cattle, swine, horses, oxen, chickens, and honeybees. Eurasian grain crops—wheat, barley, rye, and rice—made the transatlantic voyage along with inadvertent imports like dandelions and other weeds.

## The Protestant Challenge to Spain

Beyond the core regions of its empire, Spain claimed vast American dominions but struggled to hold them. Controlling the Caribbean basin, which was essential for Spain's transatlantic shipping routes, was especially difficult, since the net of tiny islands spanning the eastern Caribbean—the Lesser Antilles—provided many safe harbors for pirates and privateers. Fortified outposts in Havana and St. Augustine provided some

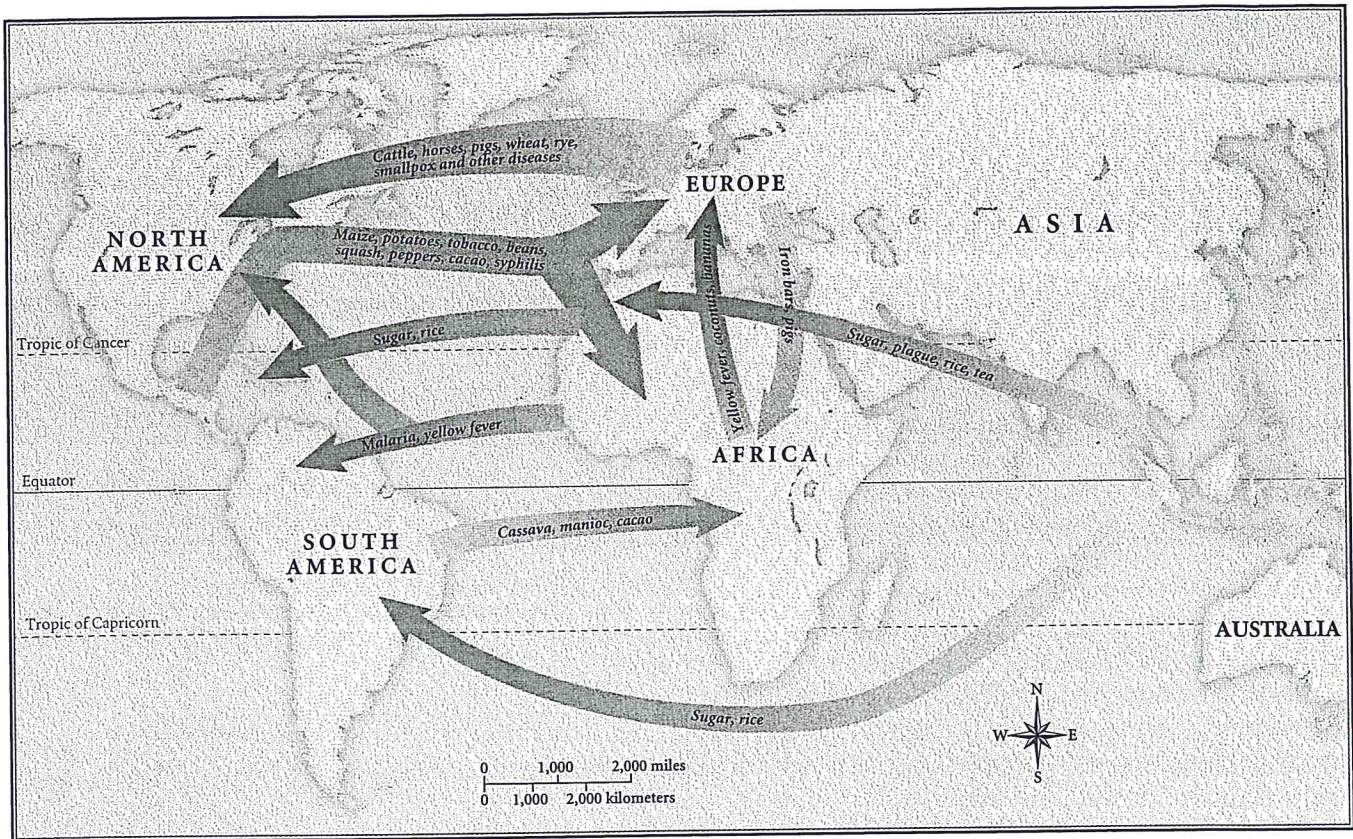
### PLACE EVENTS IN CONTEXT

How did the ecological context of colonization shape interactions between Europeans and Native Americans?

### Smallpox Victims

Hans Staden, a German soldier who was shipwrecked in Brazil in 1552, was captured by a Tupinambá Indian named Jeppipo Wasu. Shortly thereafter, Wasu and his family traveled to a neighboring village as smallpox ravaged the population; when they returned, they were very sick. Wasu recovered, but he lost his mother, two brothers, and two children. This engraving, which depicts Wasu's return amid his townspeople's grief, appeared in the third volume of Theodor de Bry's monumental *America*, published in Frankfurt in 1593. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.



**MAP 2.1****The Columbian Exchange**

As European traders and adventurers traversed the world between 1430 and 1600, they began what historians call the Columbian Exchange, a vast intercontinental movement of plants, animals, and diseases that changed the course of historical development. The nutritious, high-yielding American crops of corn and potatoes enriched the diets of Europeans, Africans, and Asians. However, the Eurasian and African diseases of smallpox, diphtheria, malaria, and yellow fever nearly wiped out the native inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere and virtually ensured that they would lose control of their lands.

protection, but they were never sufficient to keep enemies at bay.

And Spain had powerful enemies, their animosity sharpened by the Protestant Reformation and the resulting split in European Christendom (see p. 22). In the wake of Martin Luther's attack on the Catholic Church, the Protestant critique of Catholicism broadened and deepened. Gold and silver from Mexico and Peru made Spain the wealthiest nation in Europe, and King Philip II (r. 1556–1598)—an ardent Catholic—its most powerful ruler. Philip was determined to root out challenges to the Catholic Church wherever they appeared. One such place was in the Spanish Netherlands, a collection of Dutch- and Flemish-speaking provinces that had grown wealthy from textile manufacturing and trade with Portuguese outposts in Africa and Asia. To protect their Calvinist faith and political liberties, they revolted against Spanish rule in

1566. After fifteen years of war, the seven northern provinces declared their independence, becoming the Dutch Republic (or Holland) in 1581.

The English king Henry VIII (r. 1509–1547) initially opposed Protestantism. However, when the pope refused to annul his marriage to the Spanish princess Catherine of Aragon in 1534, Henry broke with Rome and placed himself at the head of the new Church of England, which promptly granted an annulment. Although Henry's new church maintained most Catholic doctrines and practices, Protestant teachings continued to spread. Faced with popular pressure for reform, Henry's daughter and successor, Queen Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603), approved a Protestant confession of faith. At the same time, however, Elizabeth retained the Catholic ritual of Holy Communion and left the Church in the hands of Anglican bishops and archbishops. Elizabeth's compromises angered radical

### Queen Elizabeth Receiving Dutch Ambassadors

This sixteenth-century Dutch painting by an anonymous artist depicts a pair of Dutch ambassadors being received by England's Queen Elizabeth I. The seventeen provinces that constituted the Dutch Republic were in rebellion against Spanish rule in the later decades of the sixteenth century and hoped for Elizabeth's support. In 1585 she signed the Treaty of Nonsuch, pledging her support for the Dutch cause. An undeclared war with Spain ensued, punctuated by the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. © Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel/ The Bridgeman Art Library.



Protestants, but the independent Anglican Church was anathema to the Spanish king, Philip II.

Elizabeth supported a generation of English seafarers who took increasingly aggressive actions against Spanish control of American wealth. The most famous of these Elizabethan “sea dogs” was Francis Drake, a rough-hewn, devoutly Protestant farmer’s son from Devon who took to the sea and became a scourge to Philip’s American interests. In 1577, he ventured into the Pacific to disrupt Spanish shipping to Manila. Drake’s fleet lost three ships and a hundred men, but the survivors completed the first English circumnavigation of the globe and captured two Spanish treasure ships. When Drake’s flagship, the *Golden Hind*, returned to England in 1580, it brought enough silver, gold, silk, and spices to bring his investors a 4,700 percent return on their investment.

At the same time, Elizabeth supported military expeditions that imposed English rule over Gaelic-speaking Catholic Ireland. Calling the Irish “wild savages” who were “more barbarous and more brutish in their customs . . . than in any other part of the world,” English soldiers brutally massacred thousands, prefiguring the treatment of Indians in North America. To meet Elizabeth’s challenges, Philip sent a Spanish Armada—130 ships and 30,000 men—against England in 1588. Philip intended to restore the Roman Church in England and then to wipe out Calvinism in Holland. But he failed utterly: a fierce storm and English ships destroyed the Spanish fleet.

Philip continued to spend his American gold and silver on religious wars, an ill-advised policy that

diverted workers and resources from Spain’s fledgling industries. The gold was like a “shower of Raine,” complained one critic, that left “no benefite behind.” Oppressed by high taxes on agriculture and fearful of military service, more than 200,000 residents of Castile, once the most prosperous region of Spain, migrated to America. By the time of Philip’s death in 1598, Spain was in serious economic decline.

By contrast, England grew significantly during the sixteenth century, its economy stimulated, as colonial advocate Richard Hakluyt noted, by a “wonderful increase of our people.” As England’s population soared from 3 million in 1500 to 5 million in 1630, its monarchs supported the expansion of commerce and manufacturing. English merchants had long supplied European weavers with high-quality wool; around 1500, they created their own **outwork** textile industry. Merchants bought wool from the owners of great estates and sent it “out” to landless peasants in small cottages to spin and weave into cloth. The government aided textile entrepreneurs by setting low wage rates and helped merchants by giving them monopolies in foreign markets.

This system of state-assisted manufacturing and trade became known as **mercantilism**. By encouraging textile production, Elizabeth reduced imports and increased exports. The resulting favorable balance of trade caused gold and silver to flow into England and stimulated further economic expansion. Increased trade

### TRACE CHANGE OVER TIME

Why did Spain’s economy deteriorate and England’s economy improve in the sixteenth century?

with Turkey and India also boosted import duties, which swelled the royal treasury and the monarch's power. By 1600, Elizabeth's mercantile policies had laid the foundations for overseas colonization. Now the English had the merchant fleet and wealth needed to challenge Spain's control of the Western Hemisphere.

## Plantation Colonies

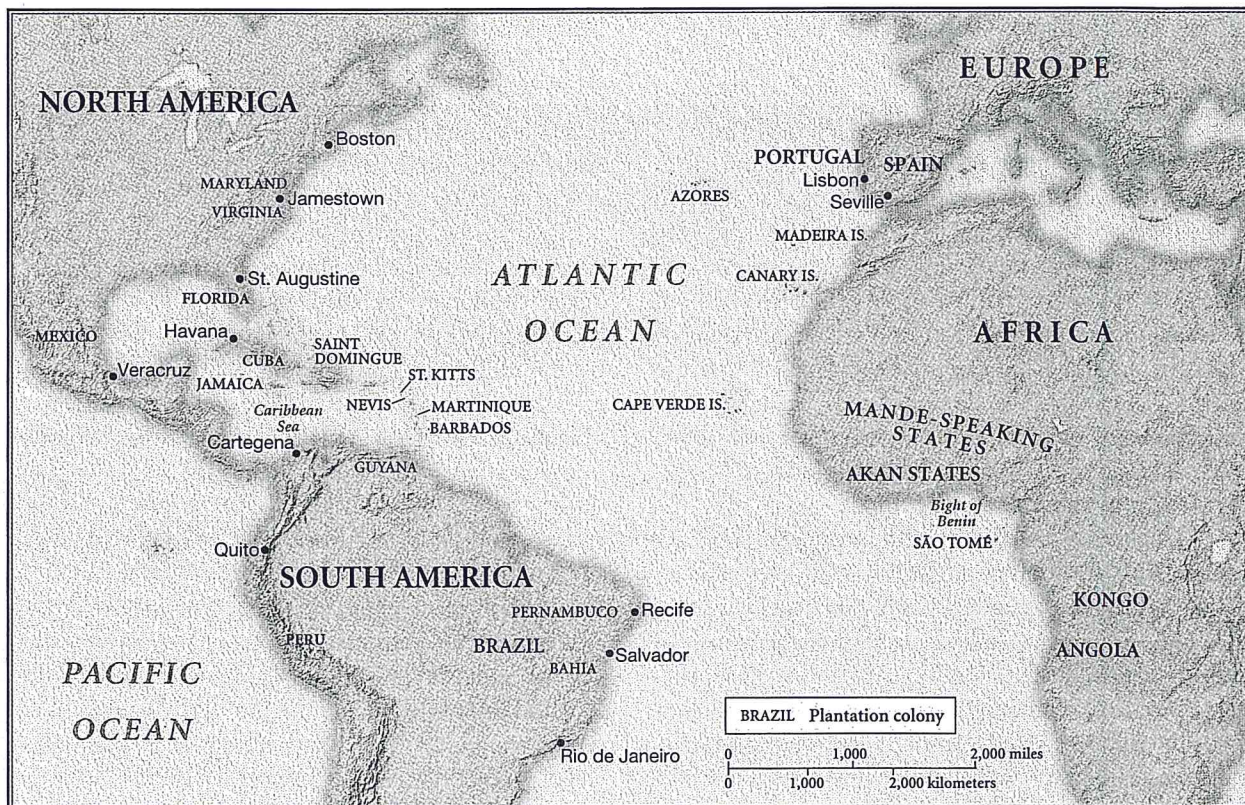
As Spain hammered out its American empire and struggled against its Protestant rivals, Portugal, England, France, and the Netherlands created successful plantation settlements in Brazil, Jamestown, Maryland, and the Caribbean islands (Map 2.2). Worldwide demand for sugar and tobacco fuelled the growth of these new colonies, and the resulting influx of colonists diminished Spain's dominance in the New World. At the same time, they imposed dramatic new pressures on native populations, who scrambled, in

turn, to survive the present and carve out pathways to the future.

## Brazil's Sugar Plantations

Portuguese colonists transformed the tropical lowlands of coastal Brazil into a sugar plantation zone like the ones they had recently created on Madeira, the Azores, the Cape Verdes, and São Tomé. The work proceeded slowly, but by 1590 more than a thousand sugar mills had been established in Pernambuco and Bahia. Each large plantation had its own milling operation: because sugarcane is extremely heavy and rots quickly, it must be processed on site. Thus sugar plantations combined backbreaking agricultural labor with milling, extracting, and refining processes that made sugar plantations look like Industrial Revolution-era factories.

Initially, Portuguese planters hoped that Brazil's indigenous peoples would supply the labor required to



**MAP 2.2**  
The Plantation Colonies

The plantation zone in the Americas extended from the tropical coast of Brazil northwestward through the West Indies and into the tropical and subtropical lowlands of southeastern North America. Sugar was the most important plantation crop in the Americas, but where the soil or climate could not support it planters experimented with a wide variety of other possibilities, including tobacco, indigo, cotton, cacao, and rice.

operate their sugar plantations. But, beginning with a wave of smallpox in 1559, unfamiliar diseases soon ravaged the coastal Indian population. As a result, planters turned to African slaves in ever-growing numbers; by 1620, the switch was complete. While Spanish colonies in Mexico and Peru took shape with astonishing speed following conquest, Brazil's occupation and development progressed more gradually; it required both trial and error and hard work to build a paying colony.

## England's Tobacco Colonies

England was slow to embrace the prospect of planting colonies in the Americas. There were fumbling attempts in the 1580s in Newfoundland and Maine, privately organized and poorly funded. Sir Walter Raleigh's three expeditions to North Carolina likewise ended in

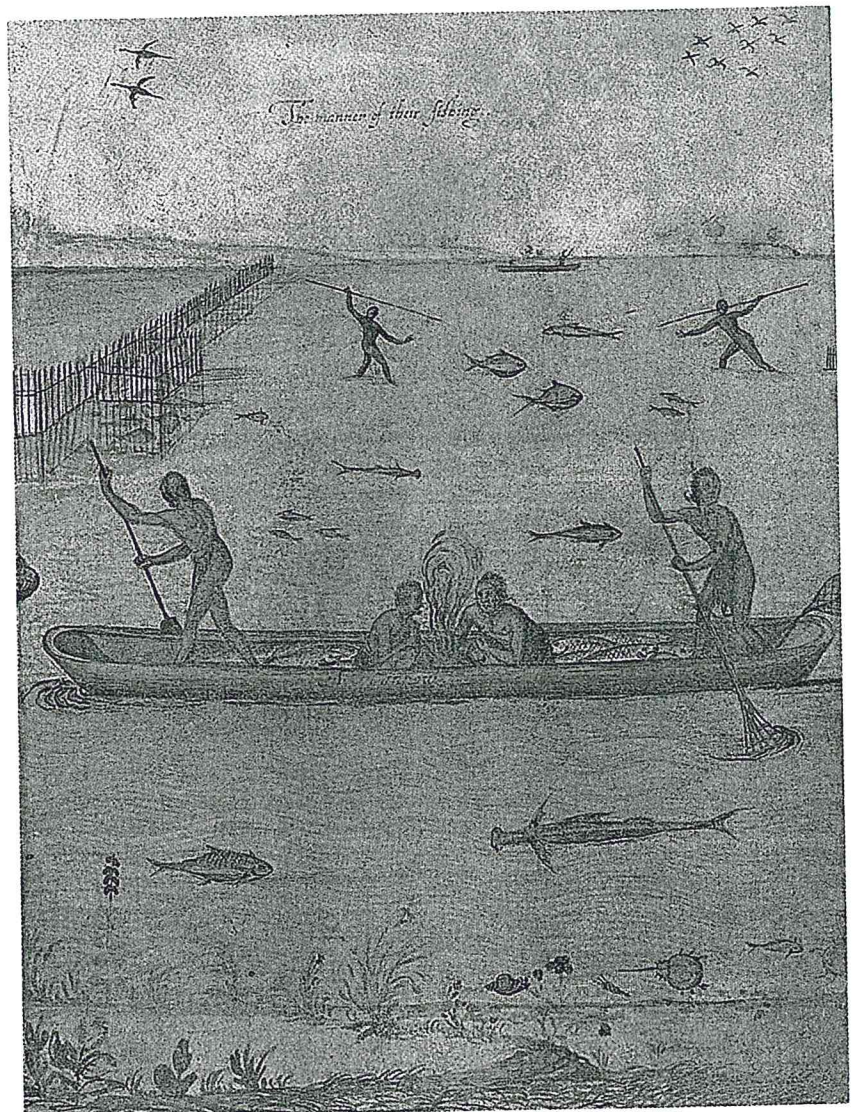
disaster when 117 settlers on Roanoke Island, left unsupplied for several years, vanished. The fate of Roanoke—the “lost colony”—remains a compelling puzzle for modern historians.

**The Jamestown Settlement** Merchants then took charge of English expansion. In 1606, King James I (r. 1603–1625) granted to the Virginia Company of London all the lands stretching from present-day North Carolina to southern New York. To honor the memory of Elizabeth I, the never-married “Virgin Queen,” the company's directors named the region Virginia (Map 2.3). Influenced by the Spanish example, in 1607 the Virginia Company dispatched an all-male group with no ability to support itself—no women, farmers, or ministers were among the first arrivals—that expected to extract tribute from the region's Indian

### Carolina Indians Fishing, 1585

Though maize was a mainstay of the Indian diet, native peoples along the Atlantic coast also harvested protein-rich fish, crabs, and oysters. In this watercolor by the English adventurer John White, Indians gather fish (in their “cannow,” or dugout canoe) in the shallow waters of the Albemarle Sound, off present-day North Carolina. On the left, note the weir used both to catch fish and to store them live for later consumption.

© Trustees of the British Museum/Art Resource, NY.





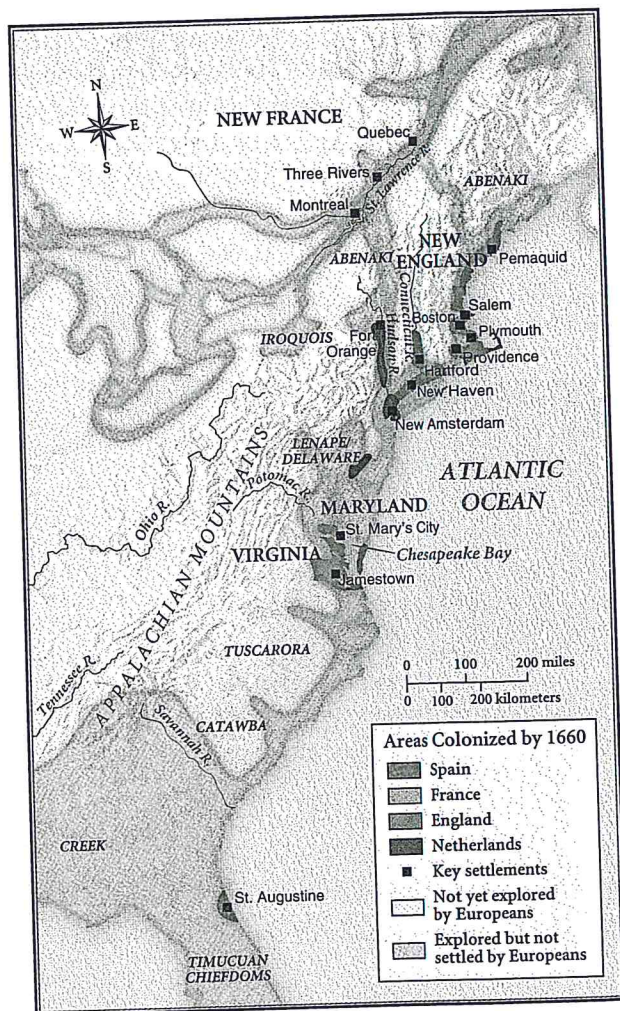


**John White's Map of Virginia**

This map, drawn by Roanoke colonist John White, may hold a clue to the fate of the so-called lost colony. The island of Roanoke is right of center, just off the mainland and within the barrier islands. Directly west, on the point where the Roanoke and Chowan rivers join, is a (barely visible) paper patch. When lit from behind, a red fort is clearly visible beneath the patch, suggesting that the Roanoke colonists may already have identified a settlement site there: when he left the colony, John White wrote that the remaining colonists "were prepared to remove from Roanoak 50 miles into the maine[land]." Archaeologists and historians plan to use this discovery to guide further explorations in the area. The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY.

population while it searched out valuable commodities like pearls and gold. Some were young gentlemen with personal ties to the company's shareholders: a bunch of "unruly Sparks, packed off by their Friends to escape worse Destinies at home." Others hoped to make a quick profit. All they wanted, one of them said, was to "dig gold, refine gold, load gold."

But there was no gold, and the men fared poorly in their new environment. Arriving in Virginia after an exhausting four-month voyage, they settled on a swampy peninsula, which they named Jamestown to honor the king. There the adventurers lacked access to fresh water, refused to plant crops, and quickly died off; only



**MAP 2.3**  
Eastern North America, 1650

By 1650, four European nations had permanent settlements along the eastern coast of North America, but only England had substantial numbers of settlers, some 25,000 in New England and another 15,000 in the Chesapeake region. French, Dutch, Swedish, and English colonists were also trading European manufactures to Native Americans in exchange for animal furs and skins, with far-reaching implications for Indian societies.