

UNIT 2 — Period 2: 1607-1754

Topic 2.1

Contextualizing Period 2

Learning Objective: Explain the context for the colonization of North America from 1607 to 1754.

The period in the Americas from 1491 to 1607 was a time of European exploration, dominated by the Spanish. In the period from 1607 to 1754, exploration began giving way to expanding colonization. In North America, the Spanish, French, Dutch, and British established colonies, with the British dominating the region from Canada to the Caribbean islands. In particular, the British established 13 colonies along the Atlantic coast. Most of these provided a profitable trade and a home to a diverse group of Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans.

From the establishment of the first permanent English settlement in North America in 1607 to the start of a decisive war for European control of the continent in 1756, the colonies evolved. At first, they struggled for survival. Over time, they became a society of permanent farms, plantations, towns, and cities. European settlers brought various cultures, economic plans, and ideas for governing to the Americas. In particular, with varying approaches, they all sought to dominate the native inhabitants.

Early Settlements

The earliest Europeans in the Americas, the Spanish and Portuguese, settled in Central and South America. The Spanish slowly migrated into North America. Subsequently, the French, Dutch, and British settled along the Atlantic coast of North America and gradually migrated westward and developed various types of colonial systems and relationships with Native Americans.

The first two successful British colonies along the Atlantic coast of North America were Jamestown and Plymouth. They served as the starting points that would lead to 13 colonies as far south as Georgia. Depending on the environmental conditions and settlement patterns, each colony developed its own economic and cultural system. For many, transatlantic trade was important, with tobacco, timber, and rice being important products. Trade, along with ties of religion and language, created strong bonds between the colonies and Great Britain. However, in the mid-1700s, trade also became a point of conflict. Colonies increasingly resisted British control over their trade.

Trade was also the mainstay of early contact between the Europeans and Native Americans. The colonists wanted a dependable food supply and the Native Americans were drawn to the iron tools and guns of the newcomers. But the Europeans generally treated the Native Americans as inferiors to be used or pushed aside. Trade also led to competition for resources among colonists and natives. In particular, the British and the French fought a series of wars for control of land. Native Americans such as the Iroquois and the Huron allied with Europeans or each other to advance their own interests.

Sources of Labor

As Europeans seized land from Native Americans, they looked for a source of labor to make the lands profitable. They first tried to enslave Native Americans. This failed because the Native Americans could escape too easily. Europeans then tried to employ indentured servants, individuals who agreed to work for a master for a set number of years (often seven) in exchange for transportation from Europe to the Americas. Indentured servants became common in the colonies, but they did not provide sufficient labor for people who owned land.

The British, following the example of the Spanish and others, soon began importing enslaved laborers from Africa. Given the steady flow of support and families from Britain, the various 13 colonies gradually developed societies that both mirrored and varied from British society. From 1607 to the 1750s, the growth of these 13 British colonies would lead them to use trade and war to dominate both the Native Americans and the other European colonists.

ANALYZE THE CONTEXT

1. Explain a historical context for understanding the interaction between the Native Americans and the Europeans as colonies were established in North America in the period from 1607 to 1754.
2. Explain a historical context for the development of slavery in the European colonies in North America in the period from 1607 to 1754.
3. Explain a historical context for the development of society and culture in the 13 British colonies in the period from 1607 to 1754.

LANDMARK EVENTS: 1600–1800

