

Motivations Underlying Colonial Settlement Part I



Why Did Nations Seek to Claim Colonies?

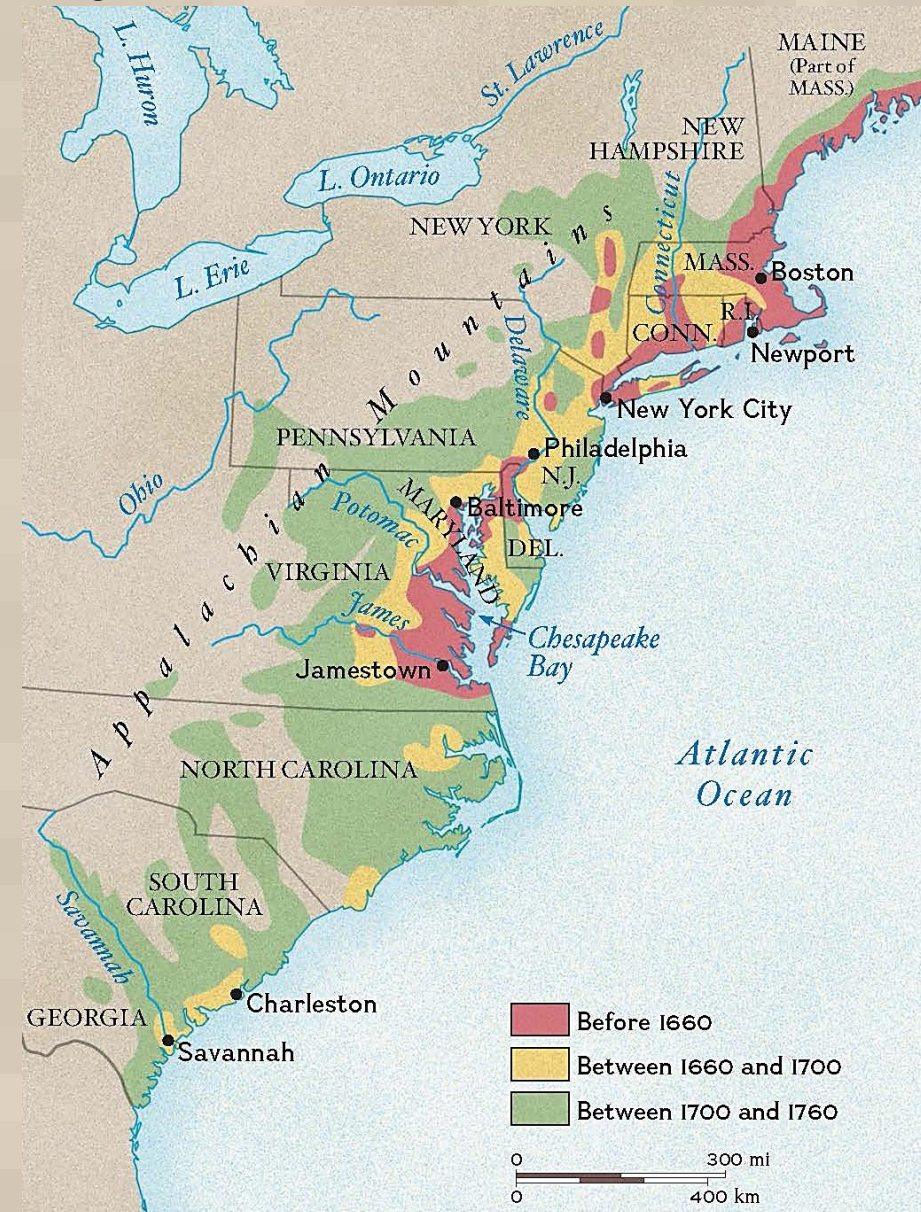
Several nations – England, Spain, Netherlands, Portugal, France – set out to build colonial empires based on certain assumptions:

↳ **Mercantilism!** Colonies would make them wealthy and powerful and give them advantages over rivals.

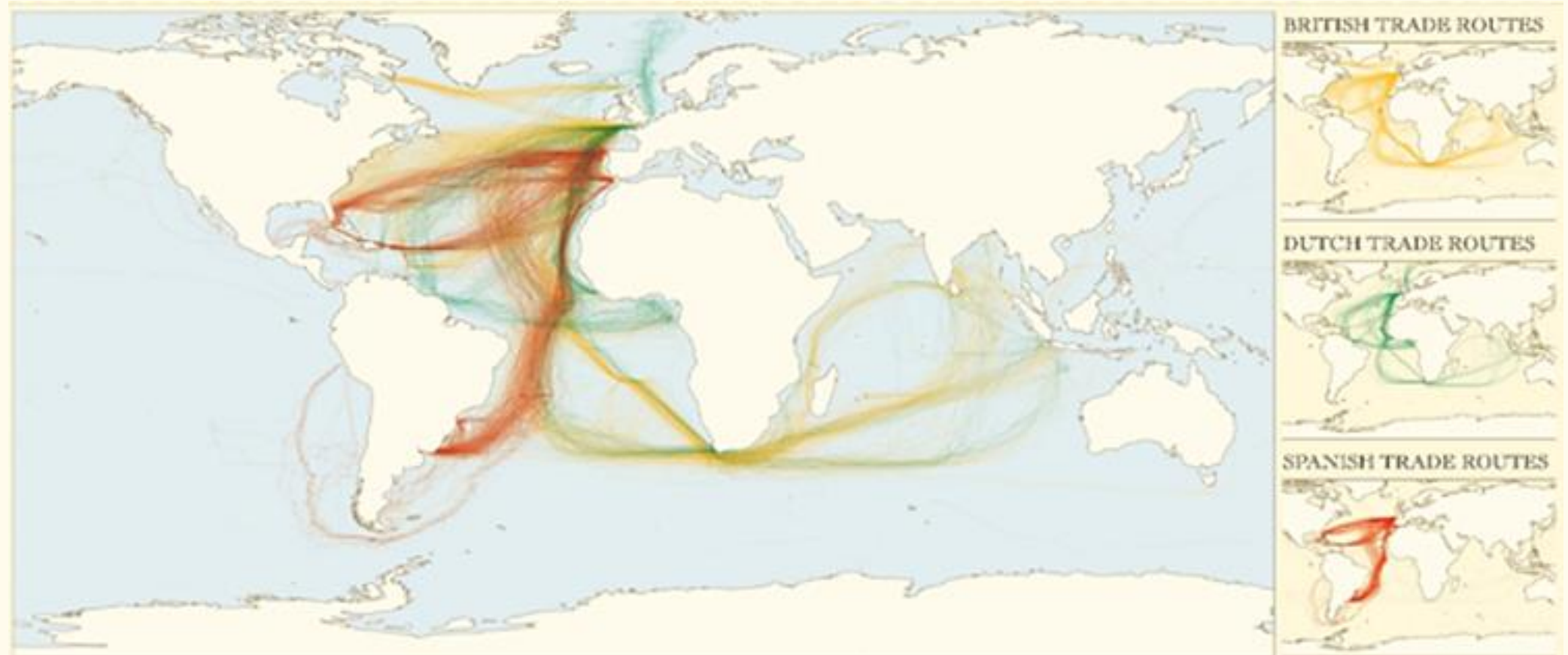
↳ The acquisition of colonies would enable them to solve various social problems such as overpopulation (relative to available land and food supplies), poverty, and the crime that was often associated with chronic lack of work for the unemployable poor.

↳ A general sense prevailed among wealthy/prosperous members of society that since the poorer classes knew they had little chance of improving their lives, which might tend to make them rebellious, colonies could serve as a sort of escape valve for pent-up frustrations.

↳ More land = the perception of more national power



Whatever the motivations, most major European nations vigorously pursued colonial policies.



Empire building and maintenance.

Shipping routes c.early-18th Century

Why Did People Risk Their Lives to Immigrate to The Colonies?

The English and other colonists who came to America came for different reasons and under different circumstances, but the motivation for virtually all who came voluntarily may be boiled down to one essential point: They wanted to improve their lives.

VOLUNTARILY CHOSE TO TRAVEL TO THE COLONIES

- Some were seeking economic advantage – most of all, a **chance to become landowners**.
 - ↳ The decision to emigrate was also often spurred by conditions in England and elsewhere in Europe – during times of strife or economic hardship, the impetus for emigration was stronger than in good, stable times.
- Some emigrants were moderately prosperous, and saw the New World as **an opportunity for investment** that would allow them to move up a few notches on the economic scale. They were “Speculators”
 - ↳ In general, however, the very well-to-do did not emigrate because they had everything to lose and could gain only at great risk.
- **Peasants** impoverished by the social and economic collapse of feudalism who hoped to find economic freedom in North America

➤ Indentured servants

- ↪ To obtain a contract as an indentured servant, one had to have something to offer – a skill such as blacksmithing or farm experience or the price of passage – so the poorest of the poor, who were chronically unemployed and had no skills, tended not to be among those who came
- ↪ Some voluntarily accepted the commitment of servitude to pay off their passage.
- ↪ Some were ‘sold’ into that temporary form of servitude by parents or families.

➤ In 1618 the Virginia Company instituted the “headright” system

- ↪ This program guaranteed that any person who immigrated into Virginia or paid for another person to settle there would receive fifty acres of land for each immigrant.
- ↪ The purpose of the “headright” system was to encourage immigration

➤ Settlers came to America for the religious freedom which was denied to them in Europe

- ↪ Jews, Puritans, Protestants, etc

➤ Criminals came to colonial America!

- ↳ Some prisoners were offered a chance to go in lieu of a prison sentence.
- ↳ Many prisoners were also sent by the courts, generally as a means of ridding the mother country of the chronically unemployable or incorrigibly criminal.

↳ So many were sent in one period that the governor of Virginia sent a letter of protest to England complaining about the influx of lawbreakers.

↳ Given the conditions of chronic underemployment and want in England, the vast majority of crimes at that time were property crimes, sometimes accompanied by violence.

↳ Many imported thieves – although not all – in finding opportunities available in the New World that did not exist in the old, managed to go straight and become productive citizens.

➤ Africans kidnapped into slavery

➤ Poor and orphaned children, as well as impoverished adults (chronically unemployed)

➤ Soldiers/Redcoats/Regulars/Lobsterbacks were stationed in the Colonies, and many made their lives there after their service.