Cultivating Colonies:

Tobacco and the Upstart Empires, 1580-1640

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This dissertation addresses a fundamental question: how did the English, French, and Dutch establish successful colonies and trade routes in the Iberian-dominated Americas? It argues that the English, Dutch, and French (a group I refer to as the “Upstart Empires”) relied upon Iberian and indigenous knowledge and trade networks in a series of illicit commercial operations and failed colonies in South America and the Caribbean before they were able to establish themselves permanently in the Americas.

These little-studied colonial experiments all had one thing in common: tobacco. A crop in high demand that grows nearly anywhere and requires little special equipment, tobacco was an obvious choice for new colonies. The Spanish Empire was founded on mineral extraction and the subjugation of extant empires. For other colonizers, the development of plantation economies was crucial. *Cultivating Colonies* looks at how this came to be. This dissertation relies upon a diverse source base, using Spanish, Dutch, French, and English archives to tell a story that transcends imperial boundaries.

The dissertation begins by considering the intersection of botany and European expansion. It situates European voyages of discovery and colonization in the context of a search for plants and their products, including spices, and argues that early colonization efforts involved a close understanding of local environments. Tobacco was a plant Europeans encountered nearly everywhere they went in the Americas, but it was only a century after Columbus that smoking became fashionable in Europe. Thus, tobacco’s rise
as a transatlantic commodity coincided with the Upstart Empires’ increased presence in the Americas.

Spanish colonists and Africans learned how to grow and consume tobacco from indigenous peoples. Spanish colonies on the margins of empire began to produce it to trade with the English, Dutch, and French from the late sixteenth century. Through this trade, the Upstart Empires learned more about tobacco, and also about the environment and geography of places just beyond the reach of the Spanish and Portuguese. They began to establish trading posts and colonies in such places, and especially in the Guianas—a vast stretch of land between the limits of the two Iberian powers. There, Carib, Arawak, and other indigenous groups were willing to ally with small numbers of interlopers against their Spanish enemies. In these settlements, Northern Europeans participated in indigenous warfare and traded commodities in exchange for agricultural knowledge, labor, and goods.

Even as the Upstarts established permanent colonies in North America and the Caribbean, they continued to settle in South America, too. Moreover, the Upstarts’ experiences in South America were crucial to the development of their colonies to the north. Colonies as diverse as St. Christopher, Virginia, and New Netherland all grew tobacco using methods and seeds from South America. In each settlement’s early years, the Upstarts were also reliant upon indigenous and African agricultural knowledge, an overlooked foundation of European colonizaton. *Cultivating Colonies* argues that the illicit tobacco trade and the short-lived colonies that sprang from it were crucial to the ultimate success of the English, Dutch, and French empires in the Americas.
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To Dad, Mom, Jerry, David, Jordan, and Isabella
Cultivating Colonies: Tobacco and the Upstart Empires, 1580-1640

Introduction

In September of 1629, a Spanish fleet of thirty-five sails descended on the tiny Leeward island of St. Christopher. The Spanish were not interested in settling any of the small islands of the Eastern Caribbean and had until that point been content to leave them to the Caribs. St. Christopher, however, had recently attracted the attention of other Europeans, and Spain feared their rivals would use it as a base from which to colonize other islands and launch attacks on the mainland. The sudden appearance of a much stronger force put the colonists into motion to defeat the Spanish. Those settlers came from not one but two nations. Frenchmen lived at either end of St. Christopher, which they called Sainte-Christophe, and English colonists inhabited the middle. Despite their differing allegiances—the two countries were then at war—they had explicitly sworn to act together in the case of attack. The colonists kept their promise, firing at the ships with “one great gune” while assembling a militia. Outnumbered, the French and English had no chance. Even their servants betrayed them. They “runn away from us & swimed aboard & told them where we hid our provissions, & in what case our Islands stood in.” As the servants ran to the Spanish invaders, they reportedly shouted, “Liberty, joyfull Liberty!”

1 “Relation of the First Settlement of St. Christophers and Nevis, by John Hilton, Storekeeper and Chief Gunner of Nevis,” in Colonising Expeditions to the West Indies, Works Issued for the Hakluyt Society, Second Series, no. 56 (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1925), ed. V. T. Harlow, 10-11. Some of these supposedly disloyal servants were probably coerced laborers. They might also have been indigenous, Irish, African, or, most likely, a mix of ethnicities. All were justified in thinking their situation might be improved with the Spanish.
Figure 1: Location of St. Christopher in the Caribbean

Figure 2: Map of St. Christopher showing English and French quarters. Abraham Peyrounin, “Carte de lisle de Sainct Christophe Scituée a 17 Degrez 30 Minutes de Lat. Septentrionale” c. 1667. Original in the John Carter Brown Library.
Defeated, the English and French found an interpreter to talk terms with the Spanish General Don Fadrique de Toledo. The commander allowed the colonists to leave without bloodshed, but with few possessions. The French settlers mostly fled to St. Martin. The English also headed to nearby Caribbean islands, although a ship carrying 300 hungry and nearly naked refugees turned up in New England and recounted their plight. The Spanish laid waste to the nascent colony, burning everything they could not carry. Some English settlers remained, hiding in the mountainous center of the colony, reportedly helped by the native inhabitants until the Spanish left. Once it was safe, the settlers emerged from hiding and tried to rebuild. Gradually, some of those who left came back. The colonists, though, were faced with growing tobacco on the ravaged island with little or no support from their European governments. The only French fleet that came to Sainte-Christophe in the first decade of the colony left shortly before the Spanish attack. Discouraged, the settlers might have given up, but they were saved by the appearance of a Dutch ship. The Dutch offered the weary colonists supplies on credit, agreeing to come back later for their tobacco crop.

The story of a shared English and French colony sacked by a Spanish fleet, the settlers’ servants deserting them, the colonists forced to flee the island or escaping to the mountains, helped by native peoples, and financially restored by the Dutch, is one that could only have happened in a particular time and place—the Caribbean of the early seventeenth century. By 1629, the Spanish held a vast empire in the Americas. They

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2 The National Archives, United Kingdom (hereafter NAUK), The State Papers, Colonial Edition, CO 1/5 no. 100.

insisted that only they had a right to colonize it, but these claims rang hollow. Already by then, the English, French, and Dutch had established colonies that would prove permanent. The Spanish bothered to send a force to a ragtag nascent colony on a tiny island because they held out hope of confining the interlopers to eastern North America or expelling them from the New World altogether. The Spanish won the battle, but they lost the war to keep the Caribbean free from northern European trespassers.

The situation in 1629 signaled a transition in the region. From the late sixteenth century, the French, English, and Dutch all took the first tentative steps towards establishing empires in the Americas. In each case, private adventurers and merchants led the early efforts, sometimes with state sanction, but often without. The most common and fruitful activities were piracy and trade. Rather than being distinct efforts, these were endeavors that existed more on a continuum. Initial attempts to colonize were somewhat less successful. Iberians destroyed early settlements, like the French colony in Florida, or they were abandoned or vanished, like the English colony at Roanoke. The French and English had some success in the fisheries of Nova Scotia, but colonial enthusiasts from all three nations wanted possessions to the south, where they imagined mineral and botanical wealth existed. Supporters promised their empires would improve upon the Spanish, but all still wanted to emulate their success. Yet colonial enthusiasts were in the minority in all three nations. A nation or monarch might allow privateering, but permanent colonization required far greater resources. Although enthusiasts promised it would bring great rewards, it also created diplomatic risks. In 1600, the English, French, and Dutch had no colonies in the Americas, despite a long-standing interest in the Americas. Yet, when the Spanish attacked St. Christopher three decades later, all three
had permanent colonies in both North America and the Caribbean. The subject of this dissertation is this remarkable transformation.

Previous scholars who asked why the Dutch, English, and French all managed to successfully colonize the Americas at roughly the same time have seen northern European success as inevitable. Although the influx of mineral wealth from the Americas in the sixteenth century temporarily augmented the already-powerful Hapsburg Empire, inflation hastened Spain’s seventeenth-century decline. This narrative does not explain English, French, and Dutch success, however. Another partial but insufficient answer is that England, France, and the Netherlands all took steps towards state-building in this period, through which they acquired the infrastructure to support empires.\(^4\)

Cultivating Colonies: Tobacco and the Upstart Empires, 1580-1640 considers how these states succeeded in creating working settlements in the New World. Colonies, including Spain's, had failed before, and new ones would continue to do so. Making a settlement sustainable required that colonists learn from previous experiences. This dissertation argues that there were distinct connections and continuities between early efforts and later successes. Privateering, illicit trading, and voyages related in print sustained European interest in the Americas. These tentative colonial efforts also built up a knowledge base about the New World and its natural resources. Those who invested in, traveled to, or promoted the Americas also demonstrate this continuity. Often, the same men whose settlements in South America failed later established successful colonies in North America and the Caribbean.

These endeavors had another thing in common: tobacco. To sixteenth-century Europeans, tobacco was a curiosity. Gradually, Europeans copied indigenous people's use of it as a medicinal drug. Within a few years, Europeans began using it recreationally. The rise of tobacco and of northern European empires was no coincidence. Tobacco propelled imperial success because it was many colonies' first economic endeavor. It appealed to small, new colonies because it could be grown anywhere, did not require special equipment, and was lucrative. Northern Europeans also found indigenous tutors, from whom they learned the finer points of cultivation.

Several phenomena obscure Northern Europeans’ early South American colonization efforts. First, they do not fit easily into established national or imperial narratives because they did not lead to permanent settlements and were often multinational. Second, to avoid Spanish or Portuguese reprisals, no state sanctioned these
private and often secret initiatives. Third, historians have experienced difficulty piecing together the evidence for these activities, because various European archives hold the surviving documents, written in many different languages.

**What is an Upstart Empire?**

This dissertation refers to the English, Dutch, French, and those who took part in their colonial ventures collectively as the “Upstart Empires.” I employ this term for a few reasons. First, it helps to remind us that their economic and territorial domination from the eighteenth into the twentieth centuries was not a foregone conclusion. Around 1600, all three nations chafed against the strength of Iberia, augmented by the power and wealth of the Roman Catholic Church and dominance of the Hapsburg dynasty. By 1700, the situation had reversed: the Spanish were a declining power, while the Dutch, French, and English amassed power, wealth, and colonies. Looking at precisely how this reversal in fortune happened will clarify that it was not always destined.

Another reason for using this collective term is that their colonies were multinational affairs. English colonists set out to the Americas from the Netherlands. French Huguenots populated Dutch and English colonies. Colonial enthusiasts sought settlers from wherever they might find them, and those settlers sold their goods to whoever would buy them. By the end of the seventeenth century, colonial projects tended to support the aims of one state, and to be supported by it, but in the early seventeenth century, the Upstarts' schemes often had other motivations. Many stories from this dissertation, like the Spanish invasion of St. Christopher, demonstrate the importance of transnational cooperation in early colonization.
The phrase “Upstart Empires” is intended therefore to counter a teleological assumption of Northern European success. Imagining that Europeans just wanted to pursue territorial empires is obviously also a fallacy. Some “failed” colonies were successful on their own terms. The merchants who financed them hoped to make money, not establish settlements that would endure for decades or centuries to come. Portugal and the Netherlands, for example, had far fewer people than other nations. Partly because of this, their empires placed primacy on commerce. Trade did not always require colonization; in some places, it was undesirable or unnecessary. In the Americas, the Spanish found they needed to colonize to extract the wealth, but procuring slaves in Africa or trading goods in Asia did not require settlement.\(^5\)

Because territorial empires left greater legacies—by determining, for example, a dominant language and cultural heritage—they have outsized importance today. Settler colonialism also had a drastic impact on local peoples and environments. The ultimate purpose of most overseas endeavors, however, was commerce. The following chapters often emphasize territorial conquest, but global trade was central to both the Upstart Empires and Iberians.

**Aims of the Work**

This dissertation aims to connect northern European empires—the English, French, and Dutch—with their Iberian antecedents. The riches emanating from the Americas spurred Northern Europeans to colonize, and they based their plans upon knowledge gleaned from Spanish works. Sometimes they planned to emulate the

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\(^5\) Emmer and Klooster, “Dutch Atlantic, 1600–1800.”
Iberians, other times to improve upon them, and occasionally to go in an entirely different direction. A rivalry with, even hatred of, Spain partially motivated Northern Europeans to undermine the Iberian empire and establish their own colonial outposts, yet the Upstart Empires owed Spain a debt. They had complicated diplomatic relationships with Spain during the early seventeenth century and were often at peace. Northern Europeans who traded with Spanish settlers on the edges of their empire supported one another materially. Even when these groups began settlements, they often planned to work with Spain.

Second, this dissertation incorporates failed colonies, illicit trading, piracy, and similarly overlooked pursuits into the narrative of Atlantic empires and nations. The story of the United States, for example, often begins with Virginia, but this project shows that success there relied upon lessons English colonists had learned elsewhere. Many of Virginia’s early settlers, investors, and promoters had experience in short-lived colonies in South America. These endeavors provided geographic and agricultural knowledge, led to alliances with indigenous groups, and helped to maintain interest in the Americas.

Thirdly, this dissertation argues that Indians and Africans played a central role in the circulation and advancement of agricultural knowledge in the Atlantic World. Sugar cultivation has dominated previous works on this subject. A crop Europeans introduced to the Americas, sugar required large initial capital investments, and would-be producers needed machinery. Tobacco, by contrast, is indigenous to the Americas, and Europeans learned to grow and use it from Indians. Africans, however, were earlier adopters and used and cultivated tobacco before it became popular with Europeans. In some instances, planters actively sought Africans with experience growing and curing
tobacco. By looking closely at agricultural practice in these early settlements, my dissertation incorporates people whose experiences have been harder to document.

A final goal is to explore the uses of Atlantic history and its potential to transcend imperial boundaries and national narratives. This project seeks to tell a story that brings together the various peoples who encountered one another in the Atlantic basin during the seventeenth century. This is not a novel archival exercise but is true to their lived experience. Settlers from the same nation often were at odds, and colonists from different nations regularly collaborated. By bringing together sources in four languages, *Cultivating Colonies* moves beyond the national or geographic boundaries historical scholarship often erects and brings attention to the interconnectedness of the seventeenth-century Atlantic. Reading these sources alongside one another, a fuller picture of the Americas in this period emerges. Importantly, the project demonstrates that although colonies are usually considered imperial projects, they often relied upon other groups, whether rival Europeans, indigenous peoples, or Africans.

Although this dissertation looks beyond traditional early America, it is a story that eventually leads to Virginia. Tobacco cultivation created the colony, turning it from a moribund settlement in a malarial swamp into a profitable and expanding venture. But without indigenous, African, and Spanish knowledge and cooperation across borders and cultures, tested in failed settlements far to its south, Jamestown would have failed.

*Sources*

Recovering the history told within this dissertation required piecing together fragmentary sources from a diverse number of archives. Sources for seventeenth century
colonial history are generally thin. In seeking to write about marginal spaces, the task was made even more difficult. By bringing together varied sources, I was able to fill out the story more completely. However, imperial archives yielded different types of sources, and varying amounts of documents survived.

The richest source base for this period comes from Spanish imperial archives, housed at the Archivo General de Indias in Seville. Although very little has been written about the Spanish settlements in present-day Venezuela and Trinidad in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, there are scores of primary sources from, to, and about the settlements in Venezuela, Trinidad y Guayana, and nearby places. Most of these sources are letters (or contemporary copies) sent between settlers and the Crown. They discuss life in the settlements and they detail requests from both sides of the Atlantic. Overall, they present a difficult existence. Letters asking for supplies or other forms of relief, complaining of predations by Northern Europeans, or detailing conflict among settlers comprise a sizable amount of the materials. Because such requests were made to the crown, there is a restrained formality in them that leads one to suspect that they were omitting things, a thesis borne out by reading them alongside other sources. These sources figure especially in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

In the United Kingdom, I consulted the collections of the National Archives, the British Library, and the Bodleian Library. The National Archives is the official repository for colonial records and it contains copies of patents awarded for colonization, some correspondence to and from the settlements, and other documents related to various aspects of both their governance and their day-to-day existence. These records are mostly contained in the State Papers Colonial series, though some relevant materials are also in
the State Papers. Because so many of these trading and settlement activities were carried out by private individuals, and because England did not have as extensive a bureaucracy as Spain, there are also pertinent materials scattered across a number of other collections. The British Library in particular has a large number of private papers of elite individuals involved in colonial enterprises. The Bodleian Library and the Huntington Library have similar holdings. For the illicit trade and settlements described in Chapters Three and Four, there is not an abundance of material. There is likewise a dearth of material on early St. Christopher. For Virginia, there is a comparative wealth. The records of the Virginia Company and other materials related to its early years are widely available in print and online. However, there are still far fewer details about the early years of the colony.

In the Netherlands, the Nationaal Archief in The Hague houses the records of the Dutch West India Company and its predecessors. This archive documents the official narrative of Dutch overseas expansion. The Amsterdam City Archives notarial records record the smaller, officially unsanctioned ships that frequented the Americas. Because the WIC was not chartered until 1621, the notarial records are better for understanding the decades before its genesis. Merchants and captains met before a notary to outline a ship’s journey and the goods it should obtain. Widows and sailors sometimes appeared to provide an official report of how a loved one had died on a voyage. In order to use these sources, I relied upon the finding aid created in the 1970s by Professor S. Hart and his students, who read thousands of pages of early modern Dutch handwriting and made a list of terms for each entry. In addition to these archives, I also did research at the Koninklijke Bibliotheek and the Amsterdam Scheepvaartsmuseum Library.
In my research, I routinely found English, Spanish, and Dutch records that mentioned French ships, sailors, and colonists. I found few records at the Archives Nationales in Paris that directly attested to such voyages, likely because a lot of French overseas activities in this period happened without the crown’s express permission. The records at the Archives d’Outre-Mer in Aix-en-Provence, which is the repository of French Imperial records, has little from this period, its strength being from the eighteenth century on. When I went to the Archives Diplomatiques, however, I discovered French and Spanish diplomats arguing about French incursions in the Americas, proof that the French, too, were involved.

As I neared the end of this project, I had a fellowship at the Omohundro Institute and Colonial Williamsburg. While there, I visited Jamestown Rediscovery, the archaeological component of Historic Jamestown. The staff there told me about their ongoing research and helped me understand how archaeology could contribute to the story I was telling using traditional historical sources. I subsequently visited the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, which houses archaeological collections from other sites in Virginia.

I also relied extensively upon published primary sources. Some of these were from the period. Accounts of explorations and settlements figure in every chapter. For chapters One and Two, I relied especially upon botanical works. Several of these were consulted while on a fellowship at the Lloyd Library in Cincinnati, which houses a collection begun by a pair of pharmacist brothers interested in medicinal history. I also used several volumes of edited primary sources published by the Hakluyt Society.
Because of the difficulty of doing archival research in four different languages and in archives across Western Europe, most scholars have chosen to study one empire, or one geographic space (often a present-day nation or U.S. state). Alone, each set of documents tells its own fascinating story. By carefully piecing these various records together, however, a much fuller, different picture emerges. Colonists in Venezuela were often trading with the “foreign pirates” they complained about in letters to the crown. An English writer might speak of Indians who “helped” him plant tobacco, while a Spanish official might explain that the Indian was in fact a kidnapped Arawak. Only by considering these sources together can the lived experience of their subjects be understood.

Still, there is much we cannot know about this story. The preponderance of what has survived was meant for official or public consumption. There are few letters home, or personal diaries, so one suspects the real story is sometimes elided. There are no archives of indigenous groups, or of enslaved Africans, though I have tried in what follows to creatively use the sources to recover their stories.

_Historiographical Interventions_

At first glance, tobacco would seem well-studied. A closer look at the literature, however, shows that historians have tended to ignore its cultivation, taking for granted that settlers grew tobacco without examining how they learned it, why they chose it over other crops, or conditions on the earliest plantations. Works that do address tobacco cultivation are typically concerned with later periods, after it was well-established on
plantations in the North American mainland.\textsuperscript{6} They are not usually interested in the technical aspects of tobacco cultivation but in its broader implications, such as connections between tobacco and slave labor or mechanics of transatlantic trade.\textsuperscript{7} Such works address in part how cultivation happened in earlier times and places but leave open the question of how Europeans initiated cultivation and what changes were made to the process over time to increase its consumer appeal.

Scholarly inattention to the cultivation and production of tobacco becomes more obvious when considering the number of works devoted to sugar production and its consequences.\textsuperscript{8} In these studies, which often employ the concept of the "sugar revolution," tobacco is what sugar replaces. It was a crop planted before the turn to more-profitable sugar, the crop that defined the modern Caribbean.\textsuperscript{9} What might we learn if we think of sugar cultivation as the \textit{end} of one story rather than a beginning of another?\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{6} T. H. Breen, \textit{Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of the Revolution} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), esp. Chapter 2. Breen gives a lot of attention to cultivation and how tobacco shaped the rhythms of life in the Chesapeake, though he is interested in a period over a century after tobacco became the primary crop of the area.


\textsuperscript{9} For an overview of the historiography of the sugar revolution, see: B. W. Higman, “The Sugar Revolution,” \textit{The Economic History Review}, n.s., 53, no. 2 (May 2000), 213-36. A collection that covers
The importance of the American natural world in the construction of early modern knowledge has been well-studied in some respects. Several excellent books discuss topics including: how early explorers described the Americas; how descriptions of the natural world made empire tangible to Europeans; how knowledge of the Americas upset or altered traditional views of the world; and the ways in which imperial projects went hand-in-hand with science. Plants in particular have generated a number of scholarly works. Collecting, identifying, and analyzing specimens built connections between European naturalists, indigenous herbalists, and academic botanists in pursuit of useful plants.

Sugar from a number of perspectives and whose title alone testifies to the prominent place of sugar in the scholarship is: Stuart B. Schwartz, ed., Tropical Babylons: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). The sugar revolution has been credited with the advent of empires, especially that of England; the sharp increase in slavery in the Atlantic World; a dramatic change in the diets of Europeans; capitalism; and more, from Karl Marx onward. The concept of the sugar revolution has come under fire, but the very debate is a testament to its place in the scholarship.

An economic historian who has tended to consider sugar and tobacco as part of a similar process is Russell R. Menard. His article “Plantation Empire,” looks at the two industries together to argue that productivity gains in plantation agriculture led to a reduction in prices, making tobacco and sugar available to more European consumers, which led to the expansion of the plantations. In Sweet Negotiations, Menard argues that the emergence of slavery on Barbados predated widespread sugar cultivation. Russell R. Menard, “Plantation Empire: How Sugar and Tobacco Planters Built Their Industries and Raised an Empire,” Agricultural History 81, no. 3 (Summer 2007), 309-32; Menard, Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

Studies of how this knowledge circulated tend to involve journeys across the Atlantic rather than those within it.\textsuperscript{12}

The scholarship has likewise centered on the consequences of transatlantic transfers when discussing more tangible exchanges. The classic formulation of this argument is Alfred Crosby's *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*.\textsuperscript{13} The book details the global transfer of animals, cultures, people, plants, and pathogens, both intentional and otherwise, to demonstrate how such exchanges transformed the world. Judith Carney's *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*, however, argues that such works “inadvertently removed the knowledge systems developed by specific peoples from the agricultural history of areas revolutionized by the plants they domesticated,” resulting in an “emphasis on seeds over the cropping systems.”\textsuperscript{14} Londa Schiebinger also champions an attention to the knowledge surrounding plants, rather than just a transfer of seeds, though she is interested in the knowledge system surrounding their uses rather than cultivation practices. In *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World*, she looks at how the peacock flower flourished in European gardens, though knowledge about its

\textsuperscript{12} This is true of other movements as well. Migration within the Americas, for example, is far less studied than transatlantic migration.


abortifacient properties did not make the journey. In demonstrating that knowledge of the plant's ability to induce abortion was widespread in the Caribbean among enslaved women, Schiebinger draws attention (though she is less interested in it) to knowledge networks within the Caribbean, an otherwise-neglected aspect of the literature on exchange.

The disregard of intra-Caribbean knowledge networks is unsurprising, as the historiography on the Caribbean itself from shortly after the Spanish conquest to the period of sugar cultivation, from about 1520-1640, remains poor. Europeans and indigenous travelers alike traversed the region, but such interchanges are understudied, perhaps because they are difficult to fit into a coherent narrative. In overviews of the history of the Caribbean, it is far easier to locate statements of the region's unimportance in this period than to find any effort to understand what was happening.

Though not in the majority, there have been some scholars who consider the Caribbean as a region best dealt with on its own terms, especially as a zone of interaction for European powers. This perhaps dates to A.P. Newton's 1933 work The European Nations in the West Indies, which argued that scholars should root any history of European colonization in the Spanish experience, beginning at least in the sixteenth century. By eschewing a focus on individual colonies, Newton emphasized how events

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16 Some works that discuss both material and intellectual exchanges with a focus on the contribution of both enslaved and indigenous peoples include: Susan Scott Parrish, American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the British Atlantic World (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2006); Joyce Chaplin, Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press); Barbara Mundy, The Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geograficas (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).

17 Arthur Newton, The European Nations in the West Indies, 1493-1688 (London: A. & C. Black, 1933);
in Europe, and especially rivalries, influenced Caribbean history. Although this perhaps led Newton to discount the importance of lived experience, and especially the contributions of non-Europeans, his attempt to render the Caribbean from the sixteenth century as a single geographic space proved important. That same year, Herbert Bolton famously advanced an all-encompassing vision of the history of the Americas, arguing that only by taking such a comprehensive view can one really appreciate the history of any individual part. Bolton was less interested in the European nations themselves and more in the people who lived in the Americas, but they shared a transnational perspective. While these works are quite old, subsequent works on the Americas generally tended to conform to national or imperial frameworks and did not fully pursue Bolton’s charge.  

More recently, a new generation of scholars have combined some of the merits of local histories and so-called “entangled histories” to look beyond the colony-metropole connection. In *Empire at the Periphery*, Christian Koot shows how Dutch merchants played a crucial role in several British colonies. April Lee Hatfield, in *Atlantic Virginia*, reveals connections over ocean and land alike, to Barbados, New Netherland, and indigenous tribes. Such works, though important in broadening our understanding of the connections among people and places in the Atlantic world, are still situated in the British

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18 One notable exception from midcentury scholarship is the work of David Beers Quinn.


Atlantic, showing its relationship to other groups. They ignore the myriad links that colonists of European powers had with each other. This work aims to bring together the regional focus of a work like Newton's with attention to lived experience discussed in works like those of Koot and Hatfield.

The Spanish mainland empire along the Caribbean basin, especially parts of present-day Colombia and Venezuela, called *Tierra Firme* by the Spanish, remains understudied and is the subject of Chapter Three of this dissertation. This reflects the peripheral status these places had in the empire. Works on the period before the eighteenth century are especially scarce. Rather than simply being places the Spanish colonized late, however, the northern coast of South America was, like other parts of the Caribbean, settled early. And, just as in the Caribbean islands, the Spanish Empire moved on to other regions after an initial period of activity. Unlike in Cuba and Hispaniola, they lost interest before establishing some of the hallmarks of Spanish governance and society, particularly an *Audiencia*. Venezuela was also more isolated and less likely to benefit from trade vessels bound for New Spain. Perhaps because of the inattention of the Spanish government, little scholarship exists on Venezuela before the eighteenth century.

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22 Cartagena de Indias, in present-day Colombia, is one exception, though scholarship on it, too, tends to focus on a later period.


There is also scant work on non-Iberian activity in the northeast coast of South America, called the Guianas. Scholars who mention the region in works on other subjects tend to be dismissive. Although the Spanish settled it, the region never had demographic or economic importance. Some initial interest came from Walter Ralegh, who hoped to find El Dorado there. Largely in response to his expeditions, the Spanish colonized the area in haste, only to abandon the settlers after several searches into the interior revealed El Dorado was simply a myth. This has led to characterizations of the area as a “no-man's-land” of impoverished settlers and foolhardy gold seekers.\(^\text{25}\) We know little about who went there, what they did, or how their experiences might have figured in later settlement of the region.

Works on the early colonization efforts of the English, French, and Dutch elsewhere in the Caribbean are somewhat more numerous. For the English, most books regarding the early colonization concern only successful, permanent colonies in the Caribbean or on the North American mainland. Though there are some excellent treatments of the earlier efforts of the English, they typically focus on one place or one island, rather than a broader history of colonization. This is perhaps because scholars of early English colonial ventures tend to acknowledge that the state played a minor role in these enterprises, making it difficult to see any organizing principles or common initiatives before about 1640.\(^\text{26}\) The literature on early French colonization is smaller,


\(^{26}\) Important works on early English colonization, whether in North America or the Caribbean, include:
though in contrast to English colonization, it often has a wider geographic scope, perhaps because French colonization did not lead to a large nation like the United States.\textsuperscript{27} The French settled the Americas far earlier than the English or Dutch, and a few works discuss their early colonies in Brazil and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{28} Still, as is the case with English colonial historiography, accounts of earlier, “failed” efforts by the French are divorced from accounts of later, permanent settlements.

Works on French and English colonization typically concern only the group in question rather than its interactions with others. Because trade was so crucial to their empire, the historiography of the Dutch in the Americas focuses much more on interactions rather than providing a straightforward account of Dutch colonization.\textsuperscript{29}


Many works about the Dutch discuss their trade relationships with other empires and peoples, including even, as one recent article demonstrates, those with whom they were at war.³⁰ While the Dutch Empire has its imperial historians, scholars of the Dutch Atlantic more readily criticize the imperial and even mercantile frameworks as inadequate tools of analysis for the seventeenth-century Atlantic.³¹ The scholarship reflects that, for several reasons, Dutch imperial schemes relied upon the help of others.

Several scholarly books written in a variety of disciplines cover the initial contact between native Americans and the Spanish.³² Such works often discuss native societies before colonization and then examine the impact of European arrival upon them. While some historians have been interested in native societies at the time of conquest, most work is by non-historians, whether anthropologists, archaeologists, linguists, or

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This trend has many consequences. First, only considering the first groups to encounter the Spanish tends to emphasize the disappearance of native peoples. The devastating effects on native populations should be studied, but not all native people died, and many remained relatively unaffected during the Spanish conquest. Such narratives quickly leave the Caribbean behind without discussing most of the region.

It is difficult to characterize the strengths of the existing literature on such a varied array of topics. Generally, there has been a move over the recent years to consider more carefully how settlers from one nation interacted with those of another. These tend to be rooted in one side's perspective: interactions of New Englanders with Indians, or of Virginians with various peoples. *Cultivating Colonies* bring all groups more fully into the picture by placing at the center interactions involving tobacco, rather than one geographic space, or one empire.

*Organization of the Dissertation*

The first chapter, “A Botanical History of European Expansion,” considers the importance of botanical knowledge in early modern Europe and how a search for particular plants drove exploration. In both the Americas and in Europe, plants were central to everyday life. People used them for food, as medicine, in religious ceremonies, and to make a variety of goods. Plants produced the raw materials for most clothing and dyes. Collecting plants was a popular and useful activity, and gardens were a way for

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33 Keegan notes that the subject has been “largely ignored” by historians. Keegan, ed., *Earliest Hispanic/Native American Interactions*, xiv. Rather than being uninterested in the subject, it seems more likely that historians are simply better equipped to discuss what happened after the arrival of the Spanish, when written records are available, rather than before.
nobility to display wealth, learning, and cosmopolitanism. In late medieval Europe, rare spices became an especially sought after commodity, and a search for another route to the east compelled fifteenth-century Iberians to begin seaborne exploration. When Europeans encountered the Americas and their people, plants acted as mediators. They were among the easiest things to transport and therefore acted as a tangible way for the Old World to experience the New. And some plants traveled farther, arriving in Asia and Africa within decades of Columbus’s voyage. Explorers and settlers relied upon indigenous knowledge of the natural world simply to survive, but they eventually used it to advance their imperial aims.

By the late sixteenth century, Northern Europeans began attempts to emulate Spanish success. The chapter takes two examples of failed colonial projects to argue that Northern Europeans did not attempt to colonize entirely new places. Instead, they settled in locations where they imagined they might recreate the environment of Spanish America. To this end, they established colonies in South America and transplanted the flora of Spanish colonies to the north.

Chapter Two, “Tobacco Cultivation as a System of Knowledge,” narrows the botanical focus to tobacco. Northern Europeans found they could not so readily replicate Spanish experiences in the Americas. There was one crop, however, that the Spanish cultivated that was suitable for a range of environments. Tobacco was not an immediately obvious trading commodity. Cultivators throughout North and South America grew and consumed it, and its use in a wide range of contexts made it highly visible to Europeans. Because tobacco was so embedded in indigenous cultures, it was harder for Europeans to
adopt than other herbs or food crops. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, smoking was fast becoming a fashionable habit in Europe.

Colonizers who sought to grow it had plenty to learn. Initially, they learned how to do so from indigenous cultivators. Africans on both sides of the Atlantic with tobacco cultivation experience were also an important source of knowledge, especially by the time the Upstart Empires established permanent colonies. As tobacco became a global commodity, cultivation practices changed to accommodate new consumers.

Chapter Three, “From Golden Dreams to Smoky Schemes” focuses on the history of the Spanish colony Trinidad y Guayana, a place populated by would-be conquistadors who launched several searches into the interior in search of El Dorado. Although the region was settled in the 1530s, the empire largely neglected it. Because Spanish ships visited so infrequently, these settlers took to growing tobacco for the Dutch, French, and English vessels that came to the area to trade with indigenous groups, mine the nearby saltpans, and occasionally plunder Spanish settlements. This trade gave northern Europeans an opportunity to learn more about South American geography, people, and potential commodities. Spanish intrusion had disrupted the lives of indigenous peoples and created an opportunity for Northern Europeans to form alliances. This sparsely populated region has fallen out of the main narrative of Colonial Latin America, and there is very little written on its history before the eighteenth century. Precisely because Trinidad y Guayana was a colonial backwater, it attracted a diverse cast of characters, making it a key site for the production and dissemination of agricultural and geographic knowledge.
Chapter Four, “Upstarts on the Amazon,” is an account of the little-known English, Dutch, and French settlements in the region from the Orinoco River to the Amazon, on the borderlands of Spanish and Portuguese power. Enterprising colonists established small settlements there to cultivate tobacco. They participated in Indian warfare and offered trade goods in exchange for agricultural labor and products. Rather than growing tobacco using traditional methods, however, these indigenous groups and northern Europeans adopted innovations, like more thorough curing, that the Spanish in Trinidad y Guayana had developed. After the Spanish cracked down more forcefully on the illicit tobacco trade in 1612, Northern European colonization increased.

These settlements demonstrate that Northern Europeans did not think North America was an obviously more suitable location for colonization. South American sites competed with them in the early seventeenth century. As Northern European governments became increasingly involved with colonial affairs, these settlements ran into trouble. They had operated well as small, mobile entities, but attempts to charter formal companies ended most of the settlements. The growth of colonies in North America and the Caribbean also hastened these colonies' collapse from the 1620s onward.

Chapter Five, “Establishing Roots,” connects the successful colonies of the English, Dutch and French with the “failed” colonies that preceded them. It shows that the groundwork laid by the earlier trading networks and impermanent settlements proved crucial to the success of permanent colonies, rather than a collection of missteps leading to a proper empire. The chapter opens with an account of the settling of St. Christopher, a small Caribbean island shared by the English and French and the first permanent Caribbean settlement of both nations. St. Christopher’s first colonizers were settlers from
failed Guiana colonies and Caribbean pirates. Like most Caribbean islands, St. Christopher grew tobacco before turning to sugar.

Next, the chapter turns to the Dutch colony of New Netherland in North America, where tobacco cultivation was also an important economic activity. A dearth of indigenous experts led to a slow start for the industry, but the colony attempted to boost production by recruiting farmers from the Netherlands, where tobacco cultivation was already established. The Dutch also were important as tobacco traders in the Caribbean, Virginia, and Europe.

Lastly, the chapter moves to Virginia, the colony most synonymous with tobacco. Thus, this dissertation will end on the subject that Colonial (British) America traditionally takes as its start. Although John Rolfe is widely credited with pioneering tobacco cultivation in Virginia, this chapter demonstrates that it instead arose from a combination of wider experiences the English had in the Atlantic World and interactions they had with Powhatan tutors. From the Powhatans, the English adopted agricultural techniques and modes of consumption. Tobacco, however, was not what the colony’s promoters hoped for. As tobacco took hold in the colony, they persistently advocated for alternatives. Tobacco only begrudgingly became an acceptable economic endeavor.

In all these colonies, settlers built upon lessons learned in earlier colonial settlements. They cultivated tobacco brought from South America using techniques first learned from indigenous peoples and refined in Spanish settlements. But they also departed from these earlier efforts in other ways. By the eighteenth century, African labor and knowledge largely replaced that of indigenous cultivators. By then, Northern
European empires looked quite different from their predecessors in a number of ways, and this obscured the connection with them.
*Chapter One

A Botanical History of European Expansion, 1450-1600

“Although my paines have not been spent (curteous Reader) in the gracious discoverie of golden myynes, nor in the tracing after silver vains, whereby my native country might be inriched, with such marchandise as it hath most in request in admiration: yet hath my labour (I trust) beene otherwise profitably imploied, in descrying of such a harmlesse treasure of herbes, trees, and plants, as the earth frankly without violence offereth unto our most necessarie uses.”

John Gerard, *The Herball, or Generall Historie of Plantes* (London, 1597)\(^1\)

In the introduction to his herbal, John Gerard offered a sort of apology. He acknowledged that those who had exploited the mineral wealth of the Americas had done the most valuable natural history work of his age. This exploitation was what brought honor to a country. But Gerard’s humility seems a thin disguise. By mentioning conquest and botany in the same breath, he instead made a claim for the importance of his own field. Pairing his activities with those of the conquistadors was a surprising decision as Gerard’s herbal did not even focus on the Americas but was concerned with all plants from throughout the known world. We can understand his apology to suggest instead that conquest and botany are the two most important activities of his time. Gerard predictably

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\(^1\) Gerard’s *Herball* was largely drawn from the Flemish botanist Rembert Dodoens’s popular 1554 work. Gerard did, however, incorporate additional plants from England and the Americas into his version. Despite this extensive borrowing, Gerard was a highly regarded gardener and herbalist, well-connected in England and with contacts in Europe and the Americas who sent him seeds and cuttings. Some scholars (as well as some of Gerard’s own contemporaries) have portrayed Gerard as giving too much credence to folklore and thus not being a true botanist. He included, for example, the barnacle tree, a plant from which geese hatched. Gerard’s work, however, was also the first herbal to include an image of the potato. A 1633 edition of his work, made after his death, aimed to make the work more accurate and excised many of the outlandish entries. Marja Smolenaars, “Gerard, John (c.1545–1612),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
had a high opinion of botanical knowledge. Yet understanding plants and their uses was a crucial skill in the early modern world and a burgeoning area of knowledge in the wake of European expansion. Gerard provides a way into this world of botanical wisdom and expertise.²

This chapter looks at the history of Atlantic exploration by putting plants front and center. Botany and agriculture were important pursuits in the Americas long before Europeans arrived. When the Spanish encountered the Aztecs, they met a people whose botanical knowledge matched their own, with gardens that the Spanish deemed superior. While the Aztecs were exceptional, they were not unique. Indigenous societies throughout the Americas had diverse and sophisticated uses for plants and an agricultural history that stretched back roughly as far as Europe’s.

Botanical resources were also very important in Europe, and a search for plant products including spices and silk were among the chief motivations of the voyages of discovery from the fourteenth century on. The conquest of parts of the Americas and the subsequent discovery of gold and silver by the Spanish in the wake of Columbus’s voyages has led plants to drop out of many narratives of the early Atlantic World. Even after they found mineral wealth, the Spanish continued to search for botanical riches. They sought access to the eastern spice trade, smuggled plants from Asia to transplant elsewhere, and evaluated the native flora of the Americas for their potential uses.

² Some previous scholarship on the literature of empire has expressed surprise at the popularity of works on the Americas that discuss plants. In his bibliographical work on early English books related to empire, John Parker wrote of John Frampton’s translation of Nicolás Monardes’s book on the plants of the Spanish Empire that “Only its utilitarian value to medical practitioners can account for this popularity.” Parker discounts the broad appeal of botanical subjects. This chapter argues that because plants and their products were so central both to everyday life and to the aims of European expansion, we should not be surprised at all that such works often discussed the natural world, and especially plants. John Parker, *Books to Build an Empire: A Bibliographical History of English Overseas Interests to 1620* (Amsterdam: N. Israel, 1965), 76.
When the Upstart Empires made their own attempts to explore and reap profit in the Americas, they also sought plants and their products. As they developed plans to emulate the Spanish, gold and silver preoccupied them, but so did botanical wealth. Using the examples of the English and the Dutch, this chapter provides two case studies to demonstrate the importance of plants in the early colonial plans of northern European powers. The first concerns the initial efforts by the English to colonize Virginia from the 1580s. It shows that the English imagined Virginia to be an extension of Spanish America rather than a new environment, and that they attempted to bring plants and agricultural knowledge from one to the other. The second example involves the Dutch in South America. It looks especially at the work of colonial promoter Willem Usselincx, who argued that the Dutch should focus their energies on South America rather than North. Warmer climates would provide a better compliment to the environment of the Netherlands, and the Dutch could make better use of it than the Spanish, he argued. Both examples show that northern Europeans drew their colonial plans with reference to the Spanish, and that ideas about the environment and its resources were still a preoccupation in the seventeenth century.

Eventually, northern European activities in the Americas came to center upon tobacco. Quick to come to European attention, tobacco caught on only slowly. It was eventually used nearly everywhere and in a variety of ways. The manner and contexts of its consumption prohibited its rapid adoption, but by around 1600, it was growing in popularity. Its production in marginal spaces of the Spanish Empire led to a brisk trade with Northern European interlopers. The rise of tobacco at the precise moment the
Upstart Empires were prepared to settle permanently in the Americas made it a crucial part of their early trade and settlement.

Plants figured in the grandest schemes of colonizers and in the most quotidian daily activities of Europeans, Africans, and native peoples. Even in places where there were other sources of wealth, Europeans still showed great concern with the environment and what it would yield. References to plants fill the writings of Christopher Columbus, Hernán Cortés, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, and other conquistadors. Their descriptions reflect genuine awe and curiosity about a strange environment, but also a belief that knowing such environments were key to conquering them. Among the many thinkers who attempted to incorporate new discoveries from the Americas into a preexisting body of knowledge, botanists were at the forefront.³

Plants in Pre-Columbian America

The best way to see this story through a botanical lens is to start from the beginning, when the Americas were first peopled. Sixteen to twenty thousand years ago, America’s first migrants made their way across a land bridge.⁴ From their initial entry to

³ The most fruitful comparison is with animals. Writers did attempt to catalogue the animals of the Americas, but their efforts were more haphazard, and hindered by the difficulty of sending specimens (live or otherwise) to Europe. The discovery of the Americas also challenged theologians, who attempted to incorporate the existence of previously unknown peoples into Biblical accounts of human origins. See, for example, Colin Kidd, “Ethnicity in the British Atlantic World, 1688-1830,” A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840, ed. Kathleen Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 260-80.

⁴ Recent archaeological and anthropological evidence has suggested that rather than arriving in one migration, there were multiple—perhaps four—migrations across the land bridge from Eurasia to North America. There is also some debate about how long ago people migrated to the Americas, though most scientists accept that it happened at least sixteen thousand years ago. See, among others: Maanasa Raghaven, et al., “Genomic Evidence for the Pleistocene and Recent Population History of Native Americans,” Science Express, 23 July 2015. There is also evidence to suggest migration did not happen via a land bridge at all: Mikkel W. Pederson, et. al. “Postglacial Viability and Colonization in North America’s Ice-Free Corridor,” Nature 537, no. 7618 (2016): 45-9.
the continent, in the far north, they ventured southeast along an ice-free corridor between two glaciers. By about fifteen thousand years ago, some groups had made it to the South American continent. They migrated first down the coasts, then along rivers. The migration was swift; the Monte Verde site in southern Chile has been dated to 14,600 years ago. By at least 5500 BCE, people had made their way to Trinidad, the first island humans migrated to in the Caribbean. A thousand years later, they had populated Cuba and Hispaniola. The first places where Columbus encountered Native Americans were among the last places they had populated prior to contact.

These early Americans were hunter-gatherers and fishermen, but in some places, they turned to cultivating plants. Agriculture in the Americas was diverse and widespread, due in part to the vastly different environments of the continents, and not all cultures practiced it. Agriculture started around 8000 BCE, when Mesoamerican farmers started domesticating plants. The first crops they grew were like gourds, corn, and pumpkins. Strong archaeological evidence about early agriculture comes from the

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8 This diversity and the challenges it presented to the spread of agriculture is a contrast to Eurasia, which is a continent roughly along an east-west axis with an overall less diverse environment. This view is put forth most famously in Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997). Diamond uses this fact, along with the lack of domesticated animals in the Americas, to explain why agriculture in the Americas was less advanced. Agriculture in the Americas was indeed less widespread than in Eurasia, but it was nonetheless sophisticated in many places, and the domestication of certain plants demonstrates a horticultural ingenuity that matched Europeans’.

9 Agriculture seems to have developed simultaneously in a number of Mesoamerican sites, though some individual plants were domesticated only once. Michael Balter, “Seeking Agriculture’s Ancient Roots,” *Science* 316, no. 5833 (29 June 2007): 1830-5; R. Douglas Hurt, *Indian Agriculture in America: Prehistory to the Present* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987), 1-2.
Tehuacán Valley, just southeast of Mexico City. The Tehuacán people became increasingly dependent upon agriculture by 3400 BCE, and some of the population lived in permanent villages by 2300 BCE. Around this same time, they started to cultivate large fields, rather than just small plots. By 700 CE, they had adopted a variety of plants into their diet, including tomatoes, several varieties of beans, peanuts, guava, chili peppers, squash, and avocados. They practiced large-scale irrigation, domesticated turkeys, produced salt, and processed cotton.  

The Maya, by contrast, perfected agriculture in a rainforest with soil that was quickly depleted of nutrients even if carefully farmed. They had to let fields lie fallow for years, even decades, for the soil to replenish itself. Despite such challenges, they relied upon agriculture as their primary food source from around 500 BCE. The Maya grew corn, beans, and squash together (the well-known “three sisters”) and built terraces to slow soil exhaustion. They also practiced slash-and-burn and chinampas, or raised-field agriculture.

The chinampas of Tenochtitlan were the most advanced form of such agriculture in the Americas. Creating them required raising fields from swamps. As Shawn Miller explains, cultivators “layered lake mud, aquatic plants, and rotting vegetation on a light skeleton of structural reeds to a height of about 1 meter above the water and then anchored the platform’s perimeter with rapidly growing willows. Fields were a few

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10 Hurt, Indian Agriculture, 1-4.
11 Ibid, 4-5.
12 In addition to the Aztec and Maya, chinampas were made by the Inca and pre-Inca societies, and in the Amazon. Thousands of acres of raised fields are still visible today in Colombia and the area around Lake Titicaca. Shawn Miller, An Environmental History of Latin America (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 19.
meters wide and around 70 meters in length, surrounded and connected by a rectilinear grid of canals offering easy canoe transport as well as habitats for fish and waterfowl.”13 Whereas traditional irrigation methods bring water to crops, *chinampas* bring crops to water, a labor-saving device. Their ingenuity and beauty attracted the admiration of the Spanish.

The agricultural innovations of Mesoamerica spread elsewhere. By 5000 BCE, farmers in the present-day Midwestern U.S. grew squash. Corn came to be the primary crop of Mississippian cultures, and those living in the warmest areas planted two crops a year. Agriculture spread to the arid southwest by 1300 BCE, where farmers developed varieties of corn better suited to the climate. Everywhere where agriculture was practiced, farmers adopted some elements of the Mesoamerican crop complex and added to them local plants, or variations upon existing ones.

Perhaps the greatest testament to the agricultural innovation of indigenous Americans is maize, first cultivated in southern Mexico’s Balsas River Valley around 9000 BCE. Unusually, maize likely had only one site of domestication. Its forbearer was tropical teosinte, a small grass whose kernels are trapped inside a hard case. Teosinte bears so faint a resemblance to maize that early researchers assumed they were unrelated, and that corn instead developed from an extinct ancestor. Such suppositions were perhaps also based upon an inaccurate estimation of the skills of its ancient cultivators. In a process that took hundreds to a thousand years, they were “able to transform a grass with

many inconvenient, unwanted features into a high-yielding, easily harvested food crop,” today responsible for about one fifth of human nutrition globally.¹⁴

Figure 3: teosinte (top), maize-teosinte hybrid (middle), maize (bottom)¹⁵

Even in places previously considered pristine natural spaces, people mediated the environment to suit their needs. Amazonian cultures practiced slash-and-burn farming, utilized regular flooding in a similar manner as Ancient Egyptians, and fertilized their poor soils in intense ways, some of which methods archaeologists have only recently discovered.¹⁶ Sixteenth-century Portuguese explorers in the Amazon recorded its terra


¹⁵ By John Doebley (http://teosinte.wisc.edu/images.html) [Attribution or CC BY 3.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0)], via Wikimedia Commons

*preta do indio* ("black Indian earth"). *Terra preta* is a rich soil made by adding charcoal (which gives it its dark color), bones, manure, organic waste, shells, game, and fish. The resulting mixture is significantly more fertile than surrounding soils. Recent investigations have posited that the soil was made from 450 BCE to 950 CE, and has replenished itself since. In fact, recent archaeological findings show that horticulture was practiced almost as early in the New World as in the Old. Indians engaged in agriculture nearly everywhere but in the most extreme climates of the Americas. Societies labeled “hunter-gatherer” often still planted some crops.

**Plants and European Expansion**

European expansion started out as a search for plants and their products. Beginning in the eleventh century, the republics of Genoa and Venice came to control European access to the riches of the east. From India, Arabia, and the Far East, they brought spices, silks, and other plant products. From their own Mediterranean colonies, they brought sugar grown by enslaved laborers. Such commodities, in demand in late

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17 *Terra preta* is a rich soil made by adding charcoal (which gives it its dark color), bones, manure, organic waste, shells, game, and fish. The resulting mixture is significantly more fertile than surrounding soils. Recent investigations have posited that the soil was made from 450 BCE to 950 CE, and has replenished itself since. Denevan, *Cultivated Landscapes*, 104-10; Bruno Glaser and William I. Woods, eds., *Amazonian Dark Earths: Explorations in Space and Time* (Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer, 2004).

18 Tom D. Dillehay, et al., “Preceramic Adoption of Peanut, Squash, and Cotton in Northern Peru,” *Science* 316, no 5833 (29 June 2007): 1890-3; Balter, “Agriculture’s Ancient Roots.” Such studies have revealed that agriculture in the Old World probably happened later than previously thought, while in the Americas, it happened earlier than was assumed. Horticulture involves growing plants, food and non-food, and does not imply the use of animals. It is more small-scale than agriculture.

medieval Europe, derived from plants that require specific climactic and soil conditions. These goods were bought in Europe using precious metals.

By the late thirteenth century, Genoese merchants were active in several Iberian ports, which led to a transfer of some of the navigational and mercantile knowledge that the trade required. Iberian attempts at exploration and long-distance navigation met with early success. The Portuguese, motivated in part by poor harvests in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, crossed the Strait of Gibraltar to capture Ceuta, a port in Morocco, in 1415. They hoped to conquer parts of North Africa, and in doing so, to establish a link to the east where they could get better access to grains and gold. When thwarted, they instead traveled south, along the coast. Spanish ships also ventured into the Atlantic. Their initial forays led to the discovery and settlement of Atlantic islands—the Azores and Cape Verde for the Portuguese, and the Canaries and Madeira for the Spanish. There, they learned some of the lessons they would later use in the Americas.

On some of the Canaries and on Madeira, the climate and soil was suitable for sugar.

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20 Several spices that were in high demand in this period were found only in the Moluccas, in eastern Indonesia, also known as the “Spice Islands.” Mace and nutmeg, which come from the same fruit, were only found on ten small remote islands known as the Bandas, in the Moluccas. Cloves were found only on a handful of northern Moluccan islands. The trade from the islands was controlled by locals and the Moluccas were unknown to foreigners. “There is no convincing evidence of Chinese, Indians, Persians, or Arabs, let alone Europeans, frequenting the Moluccan ports before the fourteenth century.” Thus, the source of these spices was shrouded in mystery. It was not until the eighteenth century that cultivators discovered the right soil and climactic conditions required to grow these spices elsewhere. Keay, *Spice Route*, 9 (quotation). The species of mulberry tree upon which silkworms feed has a wider cultivation range, but its production was constrained by the difficulty of the silk production process. On how availability of spices influenced the evolution of taste in Europe, see Stefan Halikowski Smith, “Demystifying a Change in Taste: Spices, Space, and Social Hierarchy in Europe, 1380-1750,” *The International History Review*, 29, no. 2 (2007): 237-57.

21 Sugar cultivation was first introduced to the Mediterranean by the Moors in the eighth century and was grown as far north as central Spain. The sugar industry of the eastern Mediterranean was affected by plague and warfare from the fourteenth century, leading to population decline and a rise in the use of slave labor on sugar plantations. This, according to historical geographer J. H. Galloway, makes Crete, Cyprus, and Morocco (not the Atlantic islands or the Americas) the places where “the link between sugar cultivation
The nascent Iberian empires continued to search for the sources of even more lucrative botanical goods. Christopher Columbus, a Genoese sailor-for-hire, imagined that going west was the best way to get these treasures. He believed the earth to be far smaller than it is and so he thought Japan would be roughly where the Caribbean islands are. Columbus first attempted to pitch his idea to the Portuguese in 1485. Because they had already invested so much effort into a route around Africa and distrusted his estimates of the earth’s size, they declined his offer. Three years later, Bartholomew Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope, which opened trade with India. Anxious about Portugal’s success in Africa, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain accepted Columbus’s requests for financing, along with his measurements.

Ferdinand and Isabella’s agreements with Columbus, made in April of 1492, anticipated discovering precious stones and metals, but also spices. In his first letter and slavery” were “firmly forged.” However, the destruction wrought by such forces also led to the decline of the industry. Columbus brought sugar cane to the Americas, but he doubted it would ever compete with Mediterranean sugar. J. H. Galloway, The Sugar Cane Industry: An Historical Geography from its Origins to 1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 42 (quotation); 43-7; María de los Ángeles Pérez Samper, “The Early Modern Food Revolution: A Perspective from the Iberian Atlantic,” Global Goods and the Spanish Empire, 1492-1824: Circulation, Resistance and Diversity, eds. Bethany Aram and Bartolomé Yun-Castillo (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 20.

written to the monarchs describing his voyage, Columbus said he found gold, but also several plants: “spice and cotton, as much as their highnesses shall command; and mastic, as much as they shall order to be shipped.” He also thought he had found aloe wood, rhubarb, and cinnamon.\(^\text{24}\) Columbus knew firsthand the value of mastic, a tree resin with a variety of medicinal uses that was also employed as a spice. In this period, mastic was only found on the Greek island of Chios, held by the Genoese, and a single company controlled its trade. Cinnamon was an even more lucrative commodity, controlled by the Venetians and later by the Ottomans.\(^\text{25}\) Cotton was less exotic but in demand. In addition to its economic value, seeing natives in cotton may have further convinced Columbus that he had in fact landed in Asia.\(^\text{26}\) Columbus and his backers, of course, were open to any lucrative goods they might find. They also hoped to establish trade with the east in many commodities, but plants and their products, and especially spices, were a strong motivation for Columbus’s voyage.

Traditional accounts of the Spanish Empire hold that after Columbus failed to find a route to the east, and the Americas instead became a source of gold and silver, officials became less concerned with botanical goods. The persistence of Portuguese (and later, Dutch) success in the eastern trade did not convince the Spanish to forsake spices.

\(^{23}\) King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, “Agreements with Columbus of April 17 and April 30, 1492,” in *Christopher Columbus, His Life and Work*, ed. J. B. Thatcher, 3 vols. (New York and London: Putnam’s Sons, 1903), I: 442-51.


\(^{25}\) The source of cinnamon was a mystery in Western Europe in the late Middle Ages and it was reported to be fished from the source of the Nile using nets. Columbus was mistaken about finding cinnamon.

Instead, it made the search more urgent. This need drove the Spanish to continue to look for the places where spices originated. In the 1520s, Emperor Charles V hoped to transport spices from the east by crossing the Pacific Ocean to Panama, then making an Atlantic journey to La Coruña in northwest Spain, where he planned to establish a Casa de la Contratación de la Especería.27

Another way to secure access to spices and other botanical goods was to grow them in Spanish America or, later on, the Philippines. As the work of Paula de Vos argues, botany was a persistent imperial pursuit. Rather than attempting to get rare spices by disrupting existing trade relationships, the Spanish began encouraging their cultivation in Spain, the Americas, and the Philippines.28 Early efforts to cultivate cloves, cinnamon, black pepper, saffron, sandalwood, and other spices failed. Ginger, however, was successfully smuggled from Portuguese Asia to Mexico, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico, where it was growing by the end of the sixteenth century. Ginger was so successful on Hispaniola that by 1599, the Audiencia there requested planting restrictions be placed to

27 Because the Treaty of Tordesillas had only established a dividing line in the western hemisphere, there was a question of where the line dividing Spain and Portugal’s domains was in the east. Ultimately, Charles V of Spain agreed to give up a claim to the Spice Islands in exchange for a large payment from Portugal’s John III. This did not mean Spain gave up its desire for access to the spice trade. Bethany Aram, “Taste Transformed: Sugar and Spice at the Sixteenth-Century Hispano-Burgundian Court,” Global Goods and the Spanish Empire, eds. Aram and Yun-Castillo, 127.

28 Paula De Vos, “The Science of Spices: Empiricism and Economic Botany in the Early Spanish Empire,” Journal of World History 17, no. 4 (2006): 399-427. In arguing that the Spanish Empire adopted a scientific approach to achieving its botanical aims, De Vos is part of a growing group of scholars who take issue with accounts that treat imperial science as an eighteenth century, British development. More specifically here, De Vos’s work also contends that agriculture was not just a development of northern European empire, but a concern of the Spanish as well. See also Justina Sarabia Viejo, “Posibilidades de la Especeria Mexicana en la Economia Mundial del Siglo XVI,” Andalucia y America en el Siglo XVI (Sevilla: Publicaciones de la Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de Sevilla, 1983), 389-411.
keep prices high. Another report from the same year described ginger as the island’s principal export.  

The continued search for botanical riches took shape in various ways. New environments might yield a new plant that could substitute for an existing one, or itself become valuable. By paying careful attention to the environmental conditions a plant required, cultivators could discover new places where known plants could bloom. Officials also advocated for improved transportation methods to get plants from one place to another. Spices and other botanical products were vitally important to the Spanish Empire from the beginning, and long after.

Early modern Spain had particularly compelling reasons to find a reliable source of spices, but in societies all over the world, plants were also treasured for their medicinal value. Only the wealthy could afford exotic spices, but everyone used plants medicinally. Botanical works from antiquity were chiefly catalogs of how various plants could be used to treat ailments. Indian Vedic writings from c. 1500 BCE and a Chinese herbal from 500 BCE are examples of early works that detailed plants’ medicinal values. Within the Western European tradition, Dioscorides’s *Materia Medica* (60 BCE) served as the standard pharmacopeia until the Early Modern period. Theophrastus’s groundbreaking *Enquiry Into Plants* (c. 350-287 BCE) was far more sophisticated in its attempts to study

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and classify plants. Long thought lost, the work reappeared in the fifteenth century and became an important reference in a new age of botanical knowledge-gathering.\textsuperscript{31}

Such herbal inquiry was not limited to the Old World. Like Europeans, Aztecs associated gardens with earthly paradise and especially valued plants for their medicinal value. Cortés wrote that in Tenochtitlan, “there are streets of herbalists where all the medicinal herbs and roots found in the land are sold. There are shops like apothecaries’, where they sell ready-made medicines as well as liquid ointments and plasters.”\textsuperscript{32} They also prized beautiful and aromatic plants and took pride in growing them all in a highland area with hot days, cool nights, and a long frost period. The Aztecs believed plants and trees had souls. Spanish writers like the Dominican friar Diego Durán recorded their deep reverence for nature, writing that “they passed their lives among the flowers in such blindness and darkness, since they had been deceived and persuaded by the devil, who had observed their love for blossoms and flowers . . . even the bark of resinous trees was revered so that it would create a good fire.”\textsuperscript{33}

Horticulture and landscape gardening were suitable pursuits for Aztec elites. During the fifteenth century, they established several impressive pleasure and horticultural gardens. The Texcoco leader Nezahualcoyotl (ruled 1431-1472) set up these gardens in three tributary mountain towns renowned for their medicinal plants.\textsuperscript{34} He maintained a grander one at Acatetelco, remnants of which endured to at least 1840.


\textsuperscript{33} As quoted in Patrizia Granziera, “Huaxtepec: The Sacred Garden of an Aztec Emperor,” \textit{Landscape Research} 30, no. 1 (2005), 82.

\textsuperscript{34} Texcoco was the second most important city in the Aztec Empire.
Montezuma the elder built his own garden, Huaxtepec, sixty miles southeast of Tenochtitlan. He sent messengers out to request that native gardeners procure specific plants, carefully dig them up, and transplant them in his garden. Plants were carried back to Huaxtepec “in great quantities, with the earth still about the roots, wrapped in fine cloth.” Montezuma’s botanical garden included medicinal herbs, aromatic plants, and flowers, but excluded food products. The garden also incorporated plants from throughout his domain, in a move that anticipated later European botanical gardens like the one at Kew, in London, which showcased plants from the British Empire. Plants were also demanded as tribute, another way that botany and empire were brought together in the Americas. In addition to these royal gardens, Tenochtitlan and the surrounding area also had a number of smaller botanical and zoological gardens.

The Spanish conquistadors marveled at Huaxtepec. Cortes described it in a letter to Charles V: “There are summer houses spaced out at a distance of two crossbowshots, and very bright flower beds, a great many trees with various fruits, and many herbs and sweet-smelling flowers. Certainly the elegance and magnificence of this garden make a remarkable sight.” Bernal Diaz del Castillo agreed: “Guastepeque, where lies the

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37 “Royal gardens such as Huaxtepec had vast collections of plants from the most remote corners of the Aztec tribute empire, demonstrating the extent of the empire and the power of the ruling class. According to Durán, the collection of plants that composed Aztec royal gardens showed ‘the grandeur of Mexican authority who desired to be called and perceived as lords of creation in the water as well as on land…’” Granziera, “Huaxtepec,” 97.
garden I have spoken of as the best that I have seen in my entire life, and I repeat that Cortes and Treasurer Alderete, since having seen it and walked through it, admired it and said that it was better than any garden they had seen in Castile.\textsuperscript{40} In their first encounter with an advanced civilization in the Americas, Europeans found a people with a sophisticated understanding of plants and their uses, with gardens superior to their own.

Conquistadors’ encounters with botany in the Americas were recreated for readers in Europe. Because plants were such an important part of life in the early modern world, some of the first and most popular printed books were about plants. Even in works about the Americas that were not overtly botanical, plants and the environment were frequent subjects. As demonstrated above, the journals and letters of conquistadors and missionaries often included such descriptions. Additionally, many of the first published works about the Americas were explicitly about plants, medicines, or the environment.

Works about the Americas were of course not the only books about plants. The herbal was an important and popular genre throughout early modern Europe. We might imagine the chief purpose of an herbal to be plant identification, but the earliest works are largely devoid of identification aids to help the novice. Instead, they assume that one who uses an herbal already has such general botanical knowledge. The first printed herbal in England, for example, had no images but explained where a particular species might grow.\textsuperscript{41} Rather than being concerned with plant identification, their primary use was to

\textsuperscript{40} As quoted in Granziera, “Huaxtepec,” 87.

\textsuperscript{41} Richard Banckes, \textit{Here begynneth a newe mater, the whiche sheweth and treateth of ye vertues [and] proprytes of herbes, the whiche is called an herbal} ([London], 1525). An English herbal with images did quickly follow, however: \textit{The grete herball: whiche gueuth parfyte knowlege and under standing of all maner of herbes & there gracyous vertues whiche god hath ordeyned for our prosperous welfare and helth} (1526).
explain medicinal uses. One imagines a practitioner carrying a work out into the field and into his or her consultations with the sick.

Botanical works were a newer genre with more scientific aims. Stimulated by a rediscovery of older works, botanical works aimed to organize and describe the world’s plants. Often these works sorted known species into a novel classification system. The Italian Andreae Caesalpini put forth the most sophisticated taxonomy of the time, which proposed a system that sorted plants by their habitat and fruits and seeds.\textsuperscript{42} Other works were more haphazard. The Flemish physician Matthew L’Obel’s herbal sorts plants into categories that account for such a wide variety of characteristics that it is at times hard to determine into which one a plant might belong. Some, like “grasses” and “reeds” are based upon physical properties while “useful herbs” and “grains” are about the plant’s uses.\textsuperscript{43} Descriptions in these works demonstrate an overlap between botany and medicine.

The discovery of the Americas influenced both genres. General works about the New World often discussed plants. For authors interested either in discovering new medicinal plants or in perfecting their understanding of botany, incorporating this new knowledge was imperative. Botanical works thus became an important arena for testing how the knowledge of the Americas might be incorporated into the established corpus of the ancient world. The Portuguese physician Garcia de Orta’s\textit{Coloquios dos simples e drogas he cousas medicinais da India}... put forth the notion that the wisdom of the ancients should be expanded by modern knowledge.\textsuperscript{44} The discovery of the Americas

\textsuperscript{42} Andreae Caesalpini, \textit{De Plantis} (Florence, 1583).

\textsuperscript{43} Matthias de L’Obel, \textit{Kruydtboeck oft beschrývinghe van allerleye ghwassen, kruyderen, hesteren, ende gheboomten} (Antwerp, 1581).

\textsuperscript{44} Agnes Arber, \textit{Herbals, their Origin and Evolution: A Chapter in the History of Botany, 1470-1670} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 105; Garcia De Orta, \textit{Colóquios dos simples e drogas he cousas medicinais da India}...
challenged old ideas. For writers, physicians, and other interested in plants, incorporating so many new species into the existing pharmacopeia was a worthwhile challenge. Because Europeans and Americans alike thought of plants as potential medicines, new varieties promised new cures.45

American plants began to appear in printed works early in the sixteenth century. *Guaiacum*, a genus of flowering shrubs and trees that the Spanish first encountered on Hispaniola, was of particular interest as it gained a reputation as a cure for syphilis. In 1519, a treatise on syphilis and its treatment using guaiacum was published in Mainz.46 The following year, a second work on the subject appeared.47 Plants from the Americas also made their way into herbals around this time. Otto Brunfels’s 1530 herbal incorporated guaiacum, and Jean Ruel’s 1536 work included guaiacum as well as brazilwood and corn. By the end of the decade, herbals might include a variety of American plants, though their inclusion was still somewhat haphazard and uneven.48

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45 To give some idea about how botanical knowledge proliferated in this period, we can compare works written around the time of the Spanish conquest, and those written later. In 1542, Leonhart Fuchs recorded five hundred plants, “about the number Dioscorides knew.” By 1623, Caspar Bauhin described six thousand. It was this expansion of knowledge that prompted botanists to press for new ways of organizing the natural world. Henry Lowood, “The New World and the European Catalog of Nature,” *America in European Consciousness: 1493-1570*, ed. Karen Kupperman (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1992), 295.

46 Ulrich von Hutten, *De Guaiaci et morbo gallico, liber unus* (Mainz, 1519). Hutten was both a scholar and a syphilis sufferer, and his experience as a patient informs his work. Hutten eventually died of syphilis in 1523. The work was reprinted and translated many times in the sixteenth century.

47 *Capitulo over Recetta delo arboe over legno detto Guiana: remedio contra male gallico* (Venice, 1520).

48 Hieronymus Bock, *New Kreüter Buch von underscheydt….* (Strassburg, 1539) is one example of an herbal with a number of American plants. Bock’s work was also important in advancing its own classification system. The 1546 edition of Bock was illustrated. Jean Ruel, *De Natura stirpium libri tres* (Paris, 1536).
Figure 4: Detail from Jan van der Straet, “Preparation and Use of Guayaco for Treating Syphilis,” (c. 1570). The treatment being a subject of a painting, later engraved by another artist, demonstrates how quickly knowledge about guaiacum’s alleged medicinal properties spread.

By that time, there were also several works devoted just to the plants of the Americas. Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés was a Spanish noble who took part in the conquest of the Caribbean. Upon returning to Spain in 1523, he was appointed historiographer of the Indies. He continued to visit the Americas throughout his life. He wrote a large body of work on the New World, only some of which was published during his lifetime. His first book about it, published in 1526, was on its natural history.\(^{49}\) Only later did he concern himself with a more detailed account of the conquest.\(^{50}\) Oviedo’s

\(^{49}\) Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, _De la natural hystoria de las Indias_ (Toledo, 1526).

\(^{50}\) Oviedo y Valdés, _La historia general de las Indias_ (Seville, 1535). The two works were compiled and published together after his death and subsequent translations are often of this work, which obscures somewhat the fact that Oviedo first wrote of natural history, and only nine years later published a more “general” account.
works were among the most popular on the Americas and they were reprinted and translated often, so his attention to the environment was consequential.

The physician Nicolás Monardes was also particularly interested in the plants of the Americas. Monardes did not travel to the Americas, but because he lived in Seville, he spoke to many who had and saw first-hand the goods arriving there. In an early pharmacological book, Monardes wrote favorably on plants from the Americas. He refined this thesis further in his most famous work, *Historia medicinal de las cosas que se traen de nuestras Indias Occidentales*. This book, the first half of which appeared in 1565, was a treatise on the plants of the Americas, and suggested a variety of ailments each featured plant might cure. Subsequent portions of the work were printed in 1571 and 1574, and it was very widely read. Environmental and botanical themes thus figured prominently in how countries that had no permanent colonies understood the Americas.

*Early Colonial Activities of the Upstart Empires*

How did Northern Europeans go from reading about the Americas to establishing permanent colonies and successful trade there, and why did they decide to do it at all? The answer lies in the marginal spaces of Iberian Empire. In Caribbean and mainland colonies far from the major cities of the Spanish Empire, the English, Dutch, and French traded and raided. The Upstarts Empires also developed economic and diplomatic ties with indigenous communities.

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51 Nicolás Monardes, *Dialogo llamado Pharmacodilosis o declaracion medicinal* (Seville, 1536).

Equally importantly, as they sought to increase the riches they might gain from the Americas by establishing their own colonies, they developed plans for those settlements based on Spanish America and its environment. Although northern Europeans are associated with colonizing North America, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries they were equally interested in South American. These places were those that they knew best, both from reading about the Spanish Empire and from visits to its peripheral settlements. Furthermore, even when the Upstart Empires focused on settlements to the north, they saw these places as extensions of the environment of Spanish America and attempted to replicate its flora.

The next portion of this chapter illustrates these points using two case studies. The first concerns early English attempts to settle Virginia in the 1580s. In Virginia, the English hoped they could transplant both crops and people from the south. They believed that Virginia would support the same sort of agriculture as the Caribbean or Florida. The second is the story of Flemish colonial promoter Willem Usselincx, an advocate for South American colonization. He argued that the warm climate would provide a compliment to that of the Netherlands. Because Spain was itself warm, Spanish America would never realize its agricultural potential, he wrote. Both examples illustrate that while the discovery of precious metals preoccupied the Upstart Empires, they also sought access to plants (both native and introduced) familiar to them from trade with and written accounts of the Americas.
By the end of the sixteenth century, English readers interested in the exploits of the Spanish in the Americas could choose from an abundance of books in their own language. The first major account of Spanish exploits was Richard Eden’s *The Decades of the newe world or west India* (1555). It was a compilation of several translated works, chiefly Peter Martyr D’Anghiera’s *De Orbe Novo*. Importantly, Eden’s edition includes only the first three decades, so the narrative focuses largely on the discovery and conquest of the Caribbean, ending in 1516. Martyr had himself continued the work to 1524, which covered the conquest of Mexico, but Eden left out this section.

Eden’s *Decades* also included excerpts from Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés’s history of the West Indies. Oviedo provided his readers with information on its plants and animals, climate, resources, and peoples, focusing on his home, Santo Domingo. Eden also added excerpts from the 1494 Papal Bull that granted Spain most of the Americas, treatises on navigation, works on mines, and a chapter on Christopher Columbus. This haphazard compilation consequently emphasized the Caribbean phase of the conquest and the environment. Eden’s volume was the preeminent English work on Spanish America for the next quarter century.

In last quarter of the sixteenth century, new translations abounded. John Frampton’s, *Joyfull newes out of the new founde worlde* (1577), a translation of Monardes’s treatise on the plants of the Americas, was very popular and reprinted several times.

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53 Peter Martyr D’Anghiera, *The Decades of the newe worlde or west India ... Wrytten in the Latine tounge by Peter Martyr ... and translated into Englysshe by Richard Eden* (London, 1555).
54 Peter Martyr D’Anghiera, *De Orbe Novo* (Alcalá de Henares, 1530).
times.\textsuperscript{57} English readers of this period might also have read the 1578 translation of Francisco López de Gómara’s account of Cortes’s conquest of Mexico, or a 1581 translaton of Agustín de Zárate’s history of Peru. Bartolomé de las Casas’s well-known work on the West Indies first appeared in English in 1583.\textsuperscript{58} Six years later, Richard Hakluyt published the first volume of his \textit{Principall Navigations}.\textsuperscript{59} Frequent republishing suggests that these works were popular. Passengers traveling to the Americas also probably took them onboard ships. Hakluyt himself advised that “the books of the discoveries of the west Indies and the conquestes of the same” would “kepe men occupied from worse cogitations, and… raise their myndes to courage and highe enterprizes.”\textsuperscript{60}

Works on the Spanish Empire emphasized its most famous theaters of conquest: the Caribbean, Peru, and Mexico. Even today, these places dominate scholarship on the sixteenth-century Spanish Empire. This sampling of the most widely-read accounts, however, also shows that English readers might also have read about the environment and places on the margins of the empire. Works about the exploits of English privateers like

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item The work was reprinted twice in 1577, and once each in 1580 and 1596. Parker, \textit{Books to Build an Empire}, 76.
\item Bartolomé de las Casas, \textit{The Spanish colonie, or Briefe chronicle of the acts and gestes of the Spaniards in the West Indies, called the newe World} (London, 1583).
\item Richard Hakluyt, ed., \textit{The principall navigations, voiages and discoveries of the English nation, made by sea or over land} (London, 1589-90).
\item \textit{The Original Writings and Correspondence of the Two Richard Hakluys}, ed. E.G.R. Taylor, Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society 76 (London, 1935; reprint, Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint Limited, 1967), 325. The quote is from “Discourse of Western Planting.” Taylor suggests that Hakluyt probably had in mind Gómara, Zarate, and Richard Willes’s 1577 \textit{History of Travayle}, which was an update of Eden that included the later \textit{Decades} of d’Anghiera. See p. 325, n. 1.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
John Hawkins or Francis Drake also offered glimpses of the other places in the Americas.\textsuperscript{61}

The Spanish Empire was even more diverse than Europeans imagined. Far from the silver mines of Potosí and the ruins of the glittering Aztec Empire, colonists increasingly, if prosaically, engaged in agriculture. Spanish colonists initially experimented with growing familiar European crops, particularly wheat and barley. When these attempts largely failed, they relied upon indigenous foods and supplies from Spain. Dominican friars on Hispaniola led the next concerted efforts at finding crops. These friars thought agriculture would bring stability to the island after most of its gold deposits dried up. The end of the “gold phase” also led to the establishment of sugar plantations on Hispaniola.\textsuperscript{62} By the late sixteenth century, Spanish colonists using enslaved laborers had started cultivating tropical crops: cacao in Mexico and Guatemala, indigo in Central America.\textsuperscript{63} Around the same time, settlers in eastern Venezuela and northern Hispaniola started producing tobacco. These agricultural pursuits complicate the perception that Spain based its Empire only upon mineral wealth.

Decades before the English established their first permanent colony, they were already familiar with the Americas, especially the Spanish Caribbean. When Arthur Barlowe condensed his ship’s log to provide a summary of a trip to Virginia for Walter

\textsuperscript{61} Raids on Spanish colonies focused on the circum-Caribbean, places that were accessible but also sometimes poorly defended.

\textsuperscript{62} These plantations, however, were not profitable. They were kept afloat because the ships that brought people goods to the more lucrative parts of the empire would have otherwise returned to Seville in ballast, but could instead be loaded with sugar. James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, \textit{Early Latin America: A History of Colonial Spanish America and Brazil} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 75.

Ralegh, he skipped over their visit to the Caribbean: “These Islands, with the rest adioyning, are so well knowen to your selfe, and to many others, as I will not trouble you, with the remembrance of them.”⁶⁴ Until they established their own colonies in the Caribbean in the 1620s, English ships to Virginia sailed via the Spanish West Indies. Archaeologists at Jamestown have unearthed several Spanish olive jars, used all over the world to store and transport all manner of goods, including wine, olive oil, and honey. Such vessels provide physical reminders of the extensive interactions that English and Spanish had in the Americas.⁶⁵

Colonial promoters like Hakluyt developed ideas for what the English should do in the Americas based both on Iberian accounts and on English experiences as traders and pirates. Efforts to colonize Virginia in the 1580s provided a chance to test them out. Colonizers expected to find mines, a northwest passage, and other spectacular things, but they also were increasingly interested in learning what the environment would yield. Rather than understanding Virginia as an entirely distinct, North American space, the English anticipated the same botanical and mineral resources found in Spanish American colonies.

Contemporary maps and geographic descriptions supported the notion that colonists could easily transport the people and plants of the Spanish Empire to Virginia. Early visual and written depictions of Virginia placed it closer to Florida and the rest of the Spanish Empire. The 1599 map that appeared in the second volume of Hakluyt’s

*Principall Navigations* has “La Florida” confined to the peninsula alone, while “Virginia”

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⁶⁵ William M. Kelso, Nicholas M. Luccketti, and Beverly A. Straube, *Jamestown Rediscovery V* (Richmond: Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, 1999), 36-42.
takes up the rest of the southeast.\textsuperscript{66} Jodocus Hondius’ 1623 map, “Virginiae Item et Floridae Americae Provinciarum, nova description,” like others of the period, depicts a foreshortened east coast. The map, based on a 1607 engraving, does not depict the Chesapeake but rather the “Virginia” of the Roanoke settlers, in present-day North Carolina. This map also brings Virginia and Florida together culturally: it shows a dugout canoe and claims that native people of both places use it. European powers and indigenous peoples contested the locations of “Virginia” and “Florida,” but these depicted English settlements as closer to Florida than they actually were. Only beginning in the late seventeenth century, when Europeans settled, explored, and named these borderlands did the distance between them increase on European maps.

\textsuperscript{66} William P. Cumming \textit{The Southeast in Early Maps} 3\textsuperscript{rd} edn., revised and enlarged by Louis De Vorsey, Jr. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), esp. 130-1.
Figure 5: Jodocus Hondius and Gerhard Mercator, “Virginiae item et Floridae Americae provinciarum, nova descriptio” (1606)

Figure 6: Detail of map, showing canoe

The English took their cues from Caribbean precedents as they endeavored to learn about the plants of Virginia. They saw Virginia’s environment as an extension of
the familiar islands to the south. To that end, they collected native plants and those introduced by the Spaniards, especially sugar, to cultivate in Virginia. On his way to establishing a colony at Roanoke, Richard Grenville and his men made several stops in the Caribbean, including Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo. They obtained livestock, sugar cane and other tropical plants for the colonists to attempt to grow in Virginia.\textsuperscript{67} A Spanish witness reported the group “took away with them many banana plants and other fruit-trees which they found along the shore, and made drawings of fruits and trees.”\textsuperscript{68} Hariot recorded some of the agricultural results:

\begin{quote}
We carried thither Suger canes to plant which beeing not so well preserued as was requisit, \& besides the time of the yere being past for their setting when we arried, wee could not make that profe of them as wee desired. Notwithstanding, seeing that they grow in the same climate, in the South part of Spaine and in Barbary, our hope in reason may yet co[n]tinue\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

The English did not know that Virginia’s soil was unsuitable for sugar, but they did recognize that successful agriculture required expert cultivators. In his “Discourse of Western Planting,” written two years before, Richard Hakluyt suggested voyages set out with “suger cane planters w\^{h} the plantes.”\textsuperscript{70} In 1585, the elder Hakluyt wrote a pamphlet for Virginia that recommended the colony procure “Men bred in the Shroffe in South Spaine, for discerning how Olive tree may be planted there.”\textsuperscript{71} One place to find such people was Spanish America.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{67} Roanoke Voyages, I: 187, 219.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., II: 742. The artist was John White, who produced drawings of bananas.
\textsuperscript{69} Thomas Hariot, A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia (London, 1588), 15.
\textsuperscript{70} Original Writings of the Two Richard Hakluys, 321.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 336.
\end{flushright}
Not long after Grenville took plants from the Indies, Francis Drake raided it for colonists. In 1586, Drake recruited “Turks and Negros” from Santo Domingo. A letter written from Havana in June to the king reported that next, “He took 300 Indians from Cartagena, mostly women, 200 negroes, Turks and Moors, who do menial service, and he carries them along though they are not useful in his country.” But Drake had no intention of taking them to his country. He planned instead to leave them at Roanoke, where their skills would indeed be useful. Drake next pillaged St. Augustine, where he collected more essentials. A second letter from Cuba recorded that “He has taken with him everything required, by land or sea, to establish a settlement, including even negroes which he seized at Santo Domingo and Cartagena.”

Despite the collapse of this initial attempt, Ralegh immediately determined to try again, learning from the first group’s mistakes. Under the leadership of John White, the colony would be comprised of “citizen-planters.” To settle the colony, White again turned to the Caribbean’s botanical riches. When the colony set out for Virginia in 1587, they intended “to gather yong plants of Oringes, Pines [pineapples], Mameas [mamey], and Plantonos [plantains] to set at Virginia,” but their pilot refused to take them to the place where White and others knew these plants grew.

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73 Ibid., 185. When Drake arrived in Virginia, he found the colony in a perilous state and rather than trying out the crops he brought, he instead helped the English settlers evacuate.
74 Roanoke Voyages, II: 520-521. This comes from the account of John White, who was at odds with the pilot, Simon Fernandez. See Roanoke Voyages II: 517, n. 3.
Willem Usselincx and South America

Dutch colonial literature from this same period likewise emphasizes a connection with both Spanish imperial spaces and the natural environment. The most forceful and influential proponent of Dutch colonization in this period was the Flemish exile and merchant Willem Usselincx. As a young man, he spent several years working in Spain, Portugal, and the Azores, where he learned about the overseas trade and the geography of the Spanish empire. Usselincx’s experience reflected that of many of his Dutch and English cohort in this period: he disliked Spain for religious and political reasons but had benefitted from the body of knowledge the empire had produced. In a contrast to then-prevailing views about Dutch colonial efforts, his experience convinced him that they should prioritize the West Indies over the East Indies and settlements over forts. His plan, refined in many published and unpublished writings over the next forty years, proposed that the Dutch establish colonies in places in South America and the Caribbean where the Spanish were weak. Instead of concentrating only on the extraction of American goods to trade in the European market, Usselincx envisioned transforming the economy by establishing Calvinist settlements where Indians could learn to emulate the religion, consumption habits, and agricultural techniques of their new Dutch neighbors.

At the time Usselincx began to write, the Dutch had been increasing their presence in the Americas for about a decade. Some Dutch merchants had been involved with trade in Brazil, in conjunction with Portuguese firms and some sailors had served on Spanish ships. Dutch ships rarely went to the Americas in the sixteenth century. Instead, they continued to have a brisk trade with Spain despite being in rebellion against its rule. In 1585, and again in 1595 and 1598, the Spanish reversed their position without warning
and arrested large numbers of Dutch ships trading and hauling salt in Spanish ports.\(^{75}\) In response, the Dutch started to think of other ways they might get salt (vital for the herring trade) as well as American goods like hides, tobacco, and sugar. After the arrests, Dutch merchants increasingly sent ships to the Americas and especially to the salt pans of Punta de Arraya, off the Venezuelan coast. A 1608 pamphlet, sometimes attributed to Usselinx, says there were about eighty Dutch ships a year hauling salt.\(^{76}\)

In just a few years, the Dutch had dramatically increased their presence in the Americas. Getting involved in the American trade, Usselinx and others argued, required more than commerce. In a 1608 pamphlet, the *Vertoogh*, or “Remonstrance,” Usselinx explained that colonies are necessary to increase trade.\(^{77}\) Rather than moving into North America, as the English, French, and even the Dutch were doing at the time, Usselinx argued that warmer climates were preferable. He contends that if readers think the Spanish have claimed all the best places in the Americas, they are wrong. Specifically, Usselinx suggests Florida, the Antilles, the coast of Guiana, parts of Brazil, and from the south of Brazil to the Strait of Magellan, all places the Spanish had failed to colonize. The benefit of this to Usselinx was partly in the sort of goods one might obtain there: luxury commodities that grow in warm climates. Moreover, the Dutch are in a better position to capitalize on them. The Spanish, he writes in the *Vertoogh*, do not allow the cultivation of vines or olives, because they already grow them in Spain. The Dutch, however, will have no such conflict and, another writer adds, they could soon supply not


\(^{76}\) Willem Usselinx, *Onpartydich Discours opte handelinghe van de Indien* (1608).

\(^{77}\) Willem Usselinx, *Vertogh, hoe nootwendich, nut ende profijtelick....* (1608).
just themselves but all of Europe. In choosing to settle these areas, they would also build upon their experiences in the places they have already been.

While harming the Spanish was an explicit goal of settlement, Usselincx and others also anticipated that Spanish colonists would be important trading partners. The Spanish, they write, want to trade with the Dutch because they can provide them with better, cheaper goods that they can get otherwise. This was especially true for the marginal places in the Spanish Empire that the Dutch frequented, the Caribbean and the Venezuelan coast. Trading with the Spanish, he adds, is a way to get gold and silver without ever discovering a mine. Usselincx’s comments reflected reality, too. The Dutch were carrying on steady trade with the Spanish Empire.

By settling near the Spanish, the Dutch also hoped to benefit from the animosity they inspired among indigenous groups. As the work of Benjamin Schmidt has argued, the Dutch were especially prone to seeing indigenous groups as natural allies against their mutual enemy, the Spanish. Anti-Spanish propaganda from this period even explicitly equated the Dutch experience with that of Indians. A pamphlet written after the Truce ended praises the “friendship and alliance,” the Dutch had made with some indigenous groups and suggests others, like the peoples of Chile, who were known to hate the Spanish and might therefore be amenable to the Dutch.

Although rescuing Indians is a dominant theme in some of these works, it was not the end goal. In the *Vertoogh*, Usselincx explains his plan to make the Americas a market

78 More Excellent Observations of the Estate and Affaires of Holland (London, 1622), 1.
79 Usselincx, *Vertoogh*.
81 Levendich Discours Want ghemeyne Lants welvaert (1622).
for Dutch manufactures, and this explains why colonization is superior to mere trade. If the Dutch live alongside the Indians, in time they will become more civil and “will by degrees begin to wear clothes.” Usselincx mentions that he is talking about the coastal Indians, who do not wear clothes, rather than those inland, who do. Another author suggests that the Dutch might try starting with these Indians, who, favoring clothes already, might be easily converted to Dutch fashion. In these sections, the writers denounce the Spanish and Portuguese for their failure to treat these people well. If they had done things differently, the Indians would become consumers and thus laborers. Instead, they have also introduced African slavery, creating more laborers who, “wear nothing and use nothing.” Usselincx states it more plainly in his 1608 *Onpartydich Discours* ("Impartial treatise on Indian Commerce"). Trade should be free worldwide and should be with free people. Plans for the Americas, then, were created with both the Spanish and indigenous peoples in mind, and the Dutch intended to work with both to advance their imperial ambitions.

The foundation of these plans, however, was in the soil. Usselincx writes that the greatest riches of those countries are not in their mines but in the “various fruits and crops” that grow there. The mines, he writes, are not a sure thing, and those of the Americas were already starting to be exhausted. In their ruthless pursuit of mines and laborers to toil in them, the Spanish neglected to improve the land and destroyed their

84 Usselincx, *Onpartydich Discours*.
85 Usselincx, *Vertoogh*.
relationship with the Indians. Usselincx, anticipating later Dutch interest there, uses Brazil, which is lucrative without mining, as a counterexample.

Usselincx’s plans were never adopted by the States’ General. They were debated in 1606 but dismissed when the Netherlands signed the Twelve Years’ Truce with Spain in 1609. At the end of the Truce in 1621, when a Dutch West India Company was chartered, it had a very different character from the one Usselincx envisioned, and he left the country to find supporters elsewhere. In emphasizing crops over mines, however, Usselincx anticipated the direction that seventeenth century colonization efforts would take, even if he was wrong about the details.

Conclusion: Tobacco and the Rise of the Upstart Empire

The early Virginia enterprises failed to realize an English Empire. Usselincx’s plans of Dutch farmers instructing South America natives were likewise poorly conceived. Yet the failure of any one plan had little import for colonial activities as a whole: ships of both nations continued to visit the Caribbean islands and the northern coast of South America throughout this period. Much of this experience was like previous raiding and trading, but during the years 1585 to 1607, a new trade good emerged: tobacco.

By the late sixteenth century, impoverished creole farmers throughout the Caribbean had started growing tobacco. Cultivators grew some for local use, employed tobacco as a currency, and even used it to pay tithes. In some places, locals sold it to passing ships. Tobacco became “an important vehicle of incursions on Spanish colonial
On Hispaniola’s fertile north coast, poor whites, mestizos, mulattoes, and Africans started a trade in tobacco that attracted Dutch and French privateers. Along the Venezuelan coast and the nearby island of Trinidad, another lively illicit trade developed that attracted more English ships.

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Chapter Two

Tobacco and Knowledge

This chapter looks at tobacco cultivation as a system of knowledge and considers how indigenous peoples grew it, how Europeans learned to cultivate it, and how this process changed to accommodate the new transatlantic market. It is about the small details: how seeds are planted in beds; how cultivators knew when to cut off the top of the plant; how they judged when it was properly cured; and how they placed it into barrels. It also tells a larger story—tobacco's transition from a crop grown by indigenous groups for local consumption, often as part of religious ceremonies, to one grown on vast plantations by enslaved Africa, consumed for pleasure by Europeans on both sides of the Atlantic and others around the world. The development of the transatlantic tobacco trade cannot be understood without reference to the techniques required to grow it.

The history of sugar in the Atlantic World provides a sharp contrast to tobacco. Producers needed specialized equipment to make granulated crystals from sugar juice. From the seventeenth century, cultivators made a series of improvements to production, rewarding farmers for adopting new technology. Because of this, historians have inferred that the spread of sugar cultivation in the Atlantic World required a transfer of knowledge. In this period, specialized knowledge passed in the form of equipment and written instructions among European planters. It has been easier for historians to see and

to trace this process, because there is more explicit evidence for the transfer of technological innovation.\(^2\)

Scholars of low country rice cultivation have alerted historians to the extent of African influence in American agriculture. They have demonstrated that Africans introduced not just rice itself but cultivation technology, and that Carolina planters explicitly sought Africans from ethnic groups that already cultivated rice. The work of Judith Carney has sought to expand the way scholars think about the Columbian exchange, urging them to consider the intellectual transfers that necessarily accompanied botanical exchanges.\(^3\)

The study of indigenous agriculture lags behind; it is praised precisely because it was so effortlessly efficient. The Columbian Exchange thesis decouples botanical goods

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\(^2\) B. W. Higman, “The Sugar Revolution,” *The Economic History Review*, n.s., 53, no. 2 (May 2000), 213-36. A collection that covers sugar from a number of perspectives and whose title alone testifies to the prominent place of sugar in the scholarship is: Stuart B. Schwartz, ed., *Tropical Babylons: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). The sugar revolution has been credited with the advent of empires, especially that of England; the sharp increase in slavery in the Atlantic World; a dramatic change in the diets of Europeans; capitalism, and more from Karl Marx onward. The concept of the sugar revolution has come under fire, but the very debate is a testament to its place in the scholarship.

from the way they are grown, consumed, and used. It contributes to the notion that Europeans quickly and easily dispersed crops from the Americas around the globe. But this formulation overlooks indigenous contributions.

This chapter builds upon scholarship devoted to other crops’ knowledge systems, yet, when viewed in a comparative perspective, tobacco followed a different trajectory than sugar or rice. Among the crops that would come to be grown on plantations in the Americas, tobacco is the only one that is native. While sugar, rice, and all other crops were subject to innovation and change in this period, tobacco underwent the most dramatic evolution in cultivation practices. The set of techniques surrounding its cultivation were incredibly dynamic, according to many works on the nineteenth and twentieth century that detail cultivation practices and the development of new tobacco strains.4

Focusing on tobacco cultivation in an earlier period highlights several important issues in Atlantic history. Tobacco was the chief economic activity in the first settlements of the English, French, and Dutch. Why they chose that crop, and how they learned to grow it, helps explain the rise of northern European empires in the seventeenth-century Americas. Looking closely at agricultural practices shows how central indigenous and African knowledge and labor were to European colonization from the beginning.5 As an

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indigenous crop later closely associated with enslaved Africans, tobacco is particularly revealing. More than these other crops, tobacco cultivation brought together Indians, Africans, and Europeans, and allows us to glimpse some of the cultural exchanges taking place in the seventeenth-century Atlantic.

_Tobacco and the Early Explorers_

Europeans in the Americas from Columbus onward noticed indigenous tobacco use, because Indians grew tobacco throughout the Americas. Martin Waldseemuller’s _Cosmographia Introductio_ contains Amerigo Vespucci’s description of native peoples chewing a mixture of ground shells and tobacco on Margarita Island and represents the first published descriptions of the plant.⁶ He described them using “a certain green herb which they chewed like cattle to such an extent that they could scarcely talk… When we wondered at this act we could not clearly understand the cause and secret of it.”⁷ The Margarita Islanders offered some to Vespucci and his men, but the author is silent on whether they took it, and what they thought of it if they did. In his _La historia general de las Indias_, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés documented tobacco smoke taken through the nose using a Y-shaped tube on Hispaniola. The _caciques_, he writes, inhale the smoke “until they lose their senses, and for a great space they lie stretched out on the

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⁶ Martin Waldseemuller, _Cosmographia Introductio_ (Saint-Dié, 1507).

ground without intelligence and stupefied as in a dream.”

European explorers saw tobacco use nearly everywhere they went.

By 1492, tobacco cultivation was already an advanced agricultural practice. One type of tobacco, *Nicotiana rustica*, was grown from Quebec to the Chiloé province in southern Chile, or roughly 75 degrees from the equator in either direction, “almost to the farthest limits of American agriculture.” If a particular climate could nurture any plants, *N. rustica* was among them. Centuries, or even a millennium ago, an indigenous cultivator developed a new strain. *Nicotiana tabacum* is a hybrid of two species of tobacco with no overlapping natural range. One of *N. tabacum*’s parents was taken to another location, probably the eastern valleys of the Andes, where it was cultivated and later hybridized. From there, it traveled along the Amazon, into Guiana, and out to the Caribbean, where Europeans first learned to cultivate it from the indigenous cultures with which it is most closely associated: the Arawaks, Carib, and Tupi. If you have ever smoked tobacco, it was *N. tabacum*. 

8 Translation from Dickson, *Panacea*, 26.


10 The two parents of *N. tabacum* are *N. sylvestris*, native to northern Argentina, and *N. tomentosum*, native to parts of Peru and Bolivia. Sauer, “Cultivated Plants,” 522.

Figure 7: Maps showing range of N. tabacum (left) and N. rustica. In some regions with neither, other species of tabacum were cultivated.

Tobacco figured into religious, diplomatic, social, and medicinal practices of people from Canada to Patagonia. The Tlingit, Blackfoot, and Crow cultures all planted tobacco and little or nothing else. Among the Taíno of Hispaniola, it was inhaled by a medicine man who exhaled the smoke onto a sick patient. The Iroquois used it to predict rain and prepared it with other plants as a treatment for insanity, and to clean wounds. The Apalachee of Florida smoked it before playing ball games. The Aztecs

12 This information comes from Peter Martyr’s *Decades of the New World*. An English translation of the relevant passage is located in Dickson, *Panacea*, 24-5.
incorporated it into religious rituals. The Tupinamba of Brazil smoked it in council as they debated weighty decisions.\textsuperscript{13}

Why was tobacco so appealing? Taken in small quantities, tobacco produces a relaxing effect. In larger doses, it can lead to hallucinations, or even death. It is a natural hunger suppressant, analgesic, and antiseptic. These properties led to its diverse uses. Another important characteristic of tobacco is its wide cultivation range. When cultures in the Americas adopted agriculture, they sometimes dropped a particular crop if it did not grow well where they lived. Tobacco's wide growing range, which aided its adoption throughout the continent.

Tobacco was consumed in a variety of ways, and it held different meanings in diverse cultures. Some of these uses facilitated its introduction to Europeans, while others had the opposite effect. As explained in the previous chapter, Europeans were intensely interested in the plants of the Americas, and they readily adopted many of them. Tobacco, however, did not catch on right away. Europeans' reluctance to adopt it stemmed from a few factors. One reason was that in the places where they first encountered its use, smoking was a predominant form of consumption. Smoking, however, was not a practice most Europeans at the time would have seen before, and they struggled even to describe it. Had tobacco been merely a medicinal plant, used in familiar ways, Europeans would probably have more readily adopted it. While they did initially evaluate it on its medicinal basis, the uses of tobacco that held deeper cultural meanings made it seem more foreign and suspicious. More than other plants, tobacco was harder to shed of its indigenous origins, as we shall see. The association of tobacco with pagan

\textsuperscript{13} Hans Staden records their doing so while deciding if they should eat him. Hans Staden, \textit{Warhaftige Historia und beschreibung} (Marburg, 1557).
idolatry impeded its adoption by Europeans. The taint of this association remained and appeared in anti-tobacco rhetoric throughout the seventeenth century.

Africans were early adopters who consumed and raised tobacco long before it gained European favor. The Spanish historian Oviedo y Valdés mentioned Africans smoking and growing tobacco in his 1535 work. Seville physician Nicolás Monardes’ 1571 work on tobacco observed that it was popular among Africans in the Americas. They used it as the Indians did, to ward off fatigue and make their labor easier. The Africans adopted it earlier than their masters, who Monades reports forbade tobacco smoking and burned it, forcing the enslaved to use it “in the forests and hidden places.”

Some Africans were quicker to adopt tobacco in part because they were more comfortable with its various uses. Africans also worked and lived alongside indigenous peoples in many parts of the Spanish Empire. In Africa, certain groups already smoked and chewed leaves, including as part of religious ceremonies, as in the Americas. For these reasons, some Africans on both sides of the Atlantic readily embraced tobacco. Research on the European adoption of tobacco has argued that the plant lost its religious connotations before being embraced as a purely recreational drug; for many Africans, this was unnecessary.

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15 Nicolás Monardes, *Primera y segunda y tercera partes de la historia medicinal de las cosas que se traen de nuestras Indias Occidentales que siruen en medicina...* (Sevilla, 1574), Book II, 48-9.


17 Dates by which tobacco was introduced to different areas of Africa include: Sierra Leone, c. 1607; Senegambia, 1620; Congo, 1612; Accra, 1640; Timbuktu, 1594. Christopher R. DeCorse, *An Archaeology*
Familiarity, however, eventually helped ease tobacco’s transition in Europe as well. Sailors, priests, and others who came to the Americas were among the first to adopt it and bring it back to Europe. For most of the seventeenth century, however, tobacco was evaluated for its medicinal merits rather than as a recreational drug. Tobacco first reached the Iberian Peninsula before 1530, and by the 1560s could be found growing in some medicinal and academic gardens in Western Europe. Writers also began to include it in botanical works and books about the Americas. Because ships coming from different places introduced tobacco many times, Europeans grew several varieties of tobacco there by the late sixteenth century.

 Appropriately, the first recorded reference to tobacco in an herbal was written in Nahuatl by Martinus de la Cruz, an Aztec educated by Spanish priests, and translated into Latin by a second Aztec in 1522. The work, titled Libellus de meicinalibus Indorum herbis (also known as the Badianus Manuscript), helps us to place tobacco’s steady introduction into European culture. De la Cruz recommended tobacco, or preparations including it, as a disinfectant, a depressant, and a counterirritant. It was among the components included it in his prescription for a “rumbling abdomen.” Although this work

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19 Medicinal and academic gardens grew N. tabacum and N. rustica, but they also seem to have had different varieties of these two species collected from various places. Lists of tobacco therefore sometimes mention two, three, or four types of the plant.

20 Dickson, Panacea or Precious Bane, 32.

21 Martín de la Cruz, The Badianus Manuscript, Codex Barberini, Latin 241, Vatican Library: An Aztec Herbal of 1552, trans. Emily Walcott Emmart (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1940).
remained in manuscript form until the twentieth century, it offers an insight into how elite Aztec herbalists used tobacco and other medicines in the era of the Conquest.

It was only after Europeans became more familiar with tobacco that writers there started to take greater notice of it. The famed Flemish botanist Rembert Dodoens’s 1553 herbal contains the first published image of a tobacco plant.\(^\text{22}\) The plant’s accuracy suggests that Dodoens’s artist drew it from life, using a plant in Antwerp. Nicolas Monardes’s 1565 work, which was among the most important early works on the plants of the Americas, however, does not mention tobacco.\(^\text{23}\) In 1570, Frenchman Charles Estienne published \textit{L’Agriculture et Maison Rustique}, offering readers a full chapter on the plant, along with an image.\(^\text{24}\) After these early works were published, several European authors began incorporating these text and images into their own work.

\(^{22}\) Rembert Dodoens, \textit{Trium priorum de stirpium historia commentarium....} (Antwerp, 1553). The plant seems to have been drawn from life, and seeds from \textit{N. rustica} were therefore likely brought into the Low Countries sometime prior. Dickson, \textit{Panacea or Precious Bane}, 33.

\(^{23}\) Nicolás Monardes, \textit{Historia medicinal de las cosas que se traen de nuestras Indias Occidentales} (Seville, 1565).

Figure 8: This image, from Rembert Dodoens's *Trium priorum de Stirpium historia commentariorum imagines* (Antwerp, 1553) is the first printed image of a tobacco plant. Tobacco was initially thought by many botanists to be a type of henbane, and this is here called “*hyscyamus luteus,*” yellow henbane. The book was published in Dutch the following year, the first herbal printed in that language.

An origin story of tobacco’s introduction into Europe consciousness appeared in many of these works. According to the story, the French ambassador Jean Nicot was visiting the gardens of the Portuguese king, and someone gave him a tobacco plant from Florida. Nicot carried the plant back to France, where he made people aware of it and its medicinal properties. In some versions, he even goes on to cure several people of a whole
host of different ailments.\footnote{For one example, Miquel Agustí, \textit{Libro de los Secretos de Agricultura, Casa de Campo, y Pastoral} (Zaragoza, [1625?]), 24-289. Nicot lives on in the word nicotine.} This story was repeated in early English texts, but they also sometimes mentioned that Francis Drake brought the first tobacco to England. Later, Walter Ralegh became known as the man who popularized smoking in England after returning from Virginia.\footnote{Ralegh’s association with tobacco persists. A well-known sketch by comedian Bob Newhart imagines Ralegh calling friends to tell them about his newfound habit and having to explain the entire process of smoking. This skit was perhaps informed by an older, likely apocryphal, story about Ralegh’s servant dousing him with water while he was smoking a pipe, imagining that he was on fire. Sir Walter Raleigh is a brand of pipe tobacco still sold today.} Interestingly, both Nicot’s Florida tobacco and Ralegh’s Virginia tobacco would have been \textit{N. rustica}. Although the Spanish were the first to come in extensive contact with tobacco, these early works on it show northern European efforts to claim tobacco for themselves, too.

Monardes’s oversight in the first half of his work was corrected in the second. The \textit{Segunda Parte...de las... Indias Occidentales}, published in 1571, contained a section on tobacco and a formulation of its medicinal properties that would be repeated for the next two hundred years. While the French Nicot may have received credit for making tobacco more well-known, it was still the Spanish who had the upper hand in procuring the herb for the European market.

By the late sixteenth century, smoking tobacco became a fashionable habit. The English were particularly fond of it. Paul Hentzner, a German traveling in England in 1598, wrote that, ”everywhere… the English are constantly smoking Tobacco.”\footnote{Paul Hentzner, \textit{Travels in England During the Reign of Queen Elizabeth} (London: Cassell, 1901), 42} Tobacco was also very popular in the Netherlands. In \textit{Tabacologia}, his book on the herb,
Johann Neander recalled smoking it as a student in Leiden in the 1590s, a sign that smoking had moved from the fringes of society to its elite youth.  

Figure 9 (left): A smoker from Anthony Chute, Tabaco (London, 1595)

Figure 10 (right): Late 16th/Early 17th Century English Pipe, Virginia Department of Historic Resources, photo by author

Would-be smokers, however, were left with the issue of how to procure tobacco. The sixteenth century Spanish Empire was devoted more to mineral extraction than to agricultural production. All the same, far from the silver mines of Potosí and the ruins of the glittering Aztec Empire, Spanish colonists increasingly engaged in agriculture. Spanish colonists initially experimented with growing familiar European crops, particularly wheat and barley, and when these attempts largely failed, came to rely upon indigenous foods and supplies from Spain. Dominican friars on Hispaniola led the next concerted efforts at finding crops. These friars thought agriculture would bring stability

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and after most of the island’s gold deposits dried up. The end of the gold phase also led to the establishment of sugar plantations on Hispaniola.\textsuperscript{29} In 1515, Gonzales de Villosa, who lived outside Santo Domingo, started growing it.\textsuperscript{30} By the late sixteenth century, Spanish colonists using enslaved laborers started cultivating tropical crops: cacao in Mexico and Guatemala, indigo in Central America.\textsuperscript{31} Around the same time, settlers in eastern Venezuela and northern Hispaniola started producing tobacco for illicit trade.\textsuperscript{32}

By the late sixteenth century, impoverished creole farmers throughout the Caribbean had started growing tobacco. Cultivators grew some for local use, employed tobacco as a currency, and even used it to pay tithes. In some places, locals sold it to passing ships. Tobacco became “an important vehicle of incursions on Spanish colonial territory.”\textsuperscript{33} On Hispaniola’s fertile north coast, poor whites, mestizos, mulattoes, and Africans started a trade in tobacco that attracted Dutch and French privateers. Along the Venezuelan coast and the nearby island of Trinidad, another lively illicit trade developed that attracted more English ships.

\textsuperscript{29} These plantations, however, were not profitable. They were kept afloat because the ships that brought people and goods to the more lucrative parts of the empire would have otherwise returned to Seville in ballast, but could instead be loaded with sugar. James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, \textit{Early Latin America: A History of Colonial Spanish America and Brazil} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 75.


Tobacco was a logical choice for these impoverished places. Unlike sugar, tobacco does not require special equipment. Tobacco, as explained above, also can be grown nearly anywhere. Furthermore, settlers lived among indigenous groups who were sometimes willing, sometimes forced, to assist them. For these same reasons, tobacco also appealed to northern Europeans as they tried to found their own American colonies.

The illicit trade also made sense. The Spanish crown was unable to properly supply these marginal places. Spanish mercantilism meant northern Europeans could not
legally trade with the colonies. So, the trade was mutually beneficial. The English captain John Hawkins, whom Michiel Baud sees as the founder of Hispaniola’s tobacco trade, completed four trading voyages there from 1562-1568. Hawkins even paid customs to local officials. Northern Europeans brought a variety of merchandise, and especially cloth, to trade. Tobacco, like ginger, was also used as a currency in these cash-poor places and used on the island to pay tithes or to cover other costs.34

On the coast of Venezuela, Hispaniola, and Trinidad, Spaniards learned to cultivate tobacco from indigenous groups. Scholars have never interrogated the consequences of learning in this specific place, however. The most obvious result was a preference for *N. tabacum*, even though *N. rustica* was far more widely cultivated. Most authors, from the seventeenth century to the twenty-first, have assumed that consumers favored *N. tabacum* because it was better. It came to be preferred in part because the first plantations that supplied Europeans with large quantities of tobacco were in regions where *N. tabacum* was grown. While it is true that *N. tabacum* is less potent and harsh than *N. rustica*, just as beer is weaker and gentler than rum, this contrast alone does not explain the preference.

The evidence that supply dictated taste comes from the first European accounts. Early works on tobacco do not always differentiate between *N. rustica* and *N. tabacum*, though travelers brought both types back as plants and seeds. Dodoen's influential 1618 *Cruydt-boeck* describes four types of tobacco, including “petum manneken” and “petum wijfken,” or men’s and women’s tobacco, which seem to differ in size, though perhaps

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not in species.\textsuperscript{35} John Gerard’s \textit{Herball}, first published in 1597 and updated and republished regularly thereafter, contains a lengthy description of two types of tobacco, clearly \textit{N. rustica} and \textit{N. tabacum}.\textsuperscript{36} It provides clear evidence that \textit{N. rustica} was widely used in England. In the herbal, it is called “yellow Henbane, or English Tabaco,” and Gerard reports it “is sowen in gardens where it doth prosper exceedingly, insomuch that it cannot be destroyed where it hath once sowen itself, and is dispersed into the most parts of Englande.”\textsuperscript{37} At the time Gerard wrote, tobacco was used medicinally as well as recreationally. He preferred the other sort of tobacco, which he subdivided into “Henbane of Peru,” and “Henbane of Trinidado.” Nonetheless, his description of \textit{N. rustica}, and especially his calling it “English,” demonstrates that some disagreed with him.

\textsuperscript{35} Rembert Dodoens, \textit{Cruydt-boeck} (Leiden, 1618), Part Three, Book Eighteen, 749. Dodoen’s work went through several editions and was translated into multiple languages. This is a different work from the 1553 herbal discussed above.

\textsuperscript{36} In addition to \textit{N. tabacum} and \textit{N. rustica}, there were other species of tobacco, but these tended to be cultivated in places without Europeans.

\textsuperscript{37} John Gerard, \textit{The Herball, or Generall Historie of Planites} (London, 1597), 284-289. Gerard’s work was based in part upon Dodoen’s.
Early European travelers to North America also readily smoked *rustica*. Thomas Hariot recalled that during the 1585 attempt to colonize Roanoke, “We ourselues during the time we were there vsed to suck it after their maner, as also since our returne, & haue found manie rare and wonderful experiments of the vertues thereof.”

John Brereton, who penned a 1602 account of a voyage to New England, described the tobacco there as “very strong and pleasant, and much better than any I have tasted in England”

The preference for *N. tabacum* was cultivated rather than inevitable. Other cultures introduced to tobacco in this period instead developed a taste for *N. rustica*.

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Various European groups transported tobacco to West Africa. In the Senegambia, French traders probably brought *N. rustica* and distinctive pipes with them from Louisiana, and West Africans came to prefer this type of tobacco.40 In Russia, *N. rustica* was smoked almost exclusively until the twentieth century, and it retains its popularity in some rural areas. In other regions, tobacco produced in unusual ways prevailed. Along the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana), it was probably the Portuguese who introduced smoking and Brazilian tobacco in the first decades of the seventeenth century.41 The type of tobacco they traded in this area was from the third-grade leaves of Bahia, Brazil. It was fashioned into ropes and then soaked in molasses. When the Dutch captured their fort at Elmina, they found they still needed Portuguese traders with access to Bahian tobacco. Bahian planters alone perfected this type of tobacco, which was a crucial good in the slave trade.42 These preferences for other types of tobacco demonstrate that *N. tabacum* as produced in Guiana was not inherently superior.

A preference for *N. tabacum* was not the only thing Europeans learned from their Indian tutors. In many parts of Europe, and especially England, a farmer sowed most crops using broadcast seeding: tossing seeds unevenly upon the ground. Tobacco required a different method, because the very small seeds must be sown individually. Other aspects of cultivation would have been more familiar. Indian planters throughout the Americas practiced intertillage, growing different plants together to protect the crops,

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40 Phillips, “African Smoking and Pipes.” French smokers in Europe also developed a preference for this type of pipe.
41 DeCorse, *Archaeology of Elmina*, 163. While some African societies smoked hemp or other plants, other groups were, like Europeans, introduced to smoking for the first time in this period.
replenish the soil, and reduce weeding.\textsuperscript{43} Intertillage was an ingenious agricultural innovation but to contemporary Europeans it looked disordered and ran contrary to their ideas of how crops should be cultivated. On Trinidad and elsewhere, however, native cultivators grew tobacco in separate plots, which would have looked more familiar to Europeans.

Yet many settlers did not have any agricultural experience at all. These early colonists did not come to the New World to farm, but they turned to agriculture when other options foundered. For Spaniards living in Trinidad and Guiana, it was the failure to find El Dorado; for Virginians, it came only after starvation and the realization they could not rely upon indigenous food surpluses. For these Europeans, the learning curve was steeper.

Sources about tobacco cultivation from the seventeenth century on, after this initial encounter and experience with tobacco, repeatedly describe it as an intense task requiring careful attention and experience. This is the best evidence that growing required Europeans to attentively observe and learn from indigenous groups. Tobacco is hardy yet fickle. Because the seeds are so small and more susceptible to crowding by weeds, it is important to start them in a seedbed. The tiny seeds are sown in March and transplanted to fields later in the spring. This part is especially labor-intensive, as it requires carefully mounding up earth in the fields and transferring the plants over individually. After the plants are growing, they require weekly cultivation and constant attention to prevent worms or disease. In late summer or early fall, they ripen at different times. Since Europeans grew tobacco to smoke or take as snuff, advice books warned new cultivators

\textsuperscript{43} The most well known example of crops grown through use of intertillage are the “three sisters”: corn, squash, and beans.
that it needed to be more ripe-looking than food crops before it was ready. Planters had to watch each plant carefully to know when it was mature and cut it at just the right time and place. In the earliest days of cultivation, the leaves might have been left in the field to dry out, but the process differed from place to place. Thus, tobacco required great care, but diligent students could pick it up easily. As European market demands came to bear, though, the cultivation process was refined. Growing tobacco was not just a set of steps learned once but a process continuously developed.

_Tobacco and Trade_

In some parts of the Americas, tobacco was a traded commodity before Europeans arrived. In his description of Tenochtitlan, Bernal Díaz del Castillo described a thriving tobacco market.⁴⁴ Among the coastal tribes of Guiana, certain groups grew tobacco and traded it with others who had different economic specializations.⁴⁵ This commerce was mostly local, and tobacco did not travel very great distances, but some societies grew a surplus. Europeans’ first attempts to enter the trade were supported in part by indigenous groups accustomed to seeing it as a commercial good.⁴⁶

This indigenous trade was particularly important to northern Europeans. Would-

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Nicholl’s group was supposed to be supporting Charles Leigh’s colony, established a few years before along South America’s Wiapoco River. They were blown off course, and instead of reaching their intended destination, Guiana, they wound up in the Caribbean. As the lost crew spotted the island of St. Lucia and anchored, boats of Caribs approached them. Nicholl describes them as being utterly barbaric man-eaters, but these so-called savages had come to do business. They had tobacco and food to exchange for European goods. During his time there, Nicholl describes walking through the Caribs’ “many goodly gardens,” where they grew not just an “aboundance of tobacco” but other crops, in a manner so impressive that Nicholl thought a Christian might have done it. The Englishmen attempted to stay and requested the Caribs show them where their gold deposits were. The Caribs led a group of the English into the interior but killed them instead. The rest of the English were quickly forced off the island in a small boat and had only tobacco leaves to eat for two weeks before they reached the Spanish settlement on Trinidad. Subsequent voyages, including many of the early Roanoke and Jamestown trips, continued to stop by Dominica, St. Lucia and nearby islands for tobacco, though they wisely did not try to stay. The Caribs of the islands remained independent, trading tobacco with passing ships.

47 John Nicholl, An Houre glasse of Indian newes (London, 1607). Francis Drake also traded for tobacco with indigenous groups in the Caribbean.

48 Leigh’s colony is described more fully in Chapter Four.
In the early seventeenth century, northern Europeans were getting most of their tobacco from coastal Venezuela and the lesser Antilles through trade with either Spanish colonists or indigenous groups. The anonymous author known as “C.T.” clearly delineated tobacco grown by the Spanish from that “brought from the coast of Guiana, from Saint Vincents, from Saint Lucia, from Dominica, and other places, where we buy it but of the naturall people.” He also mentioned “a sort of Caraccas Tobacco, which the Indians make up, and sell to the Spaniards.” As he wrote in 1615, Europeans and indigenous cultivators competed with one another. In just a few years, European plantations dominated the trade.

European Innovations

As transatlantic trade developed, Spanish innovations made tobacco into a global commodity. One necessary development was curing, probably the most difficult stage of production. Some uses of tobacco do not require cured leaves. When chewed or made into an ointment or a paste, the leaves should not be dried. Only when tobacco is to be smoked or taken as snuff is drying required. When tobacco is consumed locally, as it was until transatlantic trade began, curing, when it was practiced at all, could be less precise. If the leaf is to be used within a few days, it does not matter if it is a little too wet or dry. Indigenous groups often cured tobacco by hanging it in the sun or putting the leaves over a fire.

Figure 14: Indigenous peoples curing tobacco by drying the leaves in the sun. From Johann Neander, Tabacologia (1626).

Tobacco had to be properly preserved to make it a transatlantic commodity. Fresh
leaves would rot before they reached Europe, and very dry ones would turn to dust. Crops arriving in poor condition plagued planters for decades. Curing was a technical challenge, and both its necessity and difficulty are made clear in Roger North's 1621 letter. North was one of the masterminds behind the failed Amazon Company chartered in 1619 with the goal of establishing tobacco plantations along that river. When he set off from England, North did so without James I’s approval and was imprisoned upon his return. His confiscated tobacco began to rot while he was in prison, so he wrote letters asking permission for his friends to sell it. He had brought to England a valuable enough load that letters sent by him and on his behalf during his imprisonment repeatedly mention the condition of the tobacco and a concern to sell it quickly. North, a newcomer to the trade, had purchased improperly cured tobacco, and it rotted within just a few weeks.

The author C.T. provides evidence of the prevalence of curing. The writer railed against Englishmen who buy Spanish tobacco off the coast near Trinidad, because they were helping a struggling Spanish colony that might fail without this Northern European patronage. His other concern was that the Spanish were secretly adulterating their tobacco: “It is hard to find one pound weight in five hundred, that is not sophisticate [adulterated].” Nearly all the tobacco “is noynted and slubbered over with a kind of juyce, or syrope, made of Salt-water, or the dregges or filth of Sugar, called Malasses, of black honey, Guiana pepper, leeze of Wine; to which in some places they adde a red berry called Anotto, and other tawniberies, with which the Indians paint their bodies, and their beds.” They did this, according to C.T., to give the tobacco a better color and to hide

defects, but these additions also dangerously changed the tobacco’s properties. “But this is not the worst,” he warned, because the Spanish “have added poyson.” If only consumers could have seen “how the Spanish slaves make it up, how they dress their sores and pockie ulcers, with the same unwasht hands with which they Slubber and anoynt the Tobacco, and call it sauce *per los perros Luteranos*, for Lutheran dogges,” they would not smoke it.  

Whether the Spanish started poisoning tobacco to hurt Lutherans, C.T.’s work provides tantalizing glimpses into production. For example, he wrote that the English should buy their tobacco from indigenous tribes on St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Dominica, and the Wild Coast, or else from Santo Domingo “where the Spaniards have not yet learned the Art of Sophistication.” He wrote the treatise to encourage tobacco cultivation in England, and his work is the first published to explain how curing is done.

Despite the author’s misgivings, northern Europeans indeed emulated the Spanish. In the South American colonies of the English and Dutch, which fostered permanent settlements in North America and the Caribbean, tobacco cultivation was the sole serious commercial activity. But why tobacco? In the tropical and semi-tropical climates of these earliest settlements, some colonists might have turned to several other commodities with a market in Europe, but they repeatedly chose tobacco. Although other crops eventually replaced it in most of these places, all began by growing tobacco.

The answer is that it was the perfect crop for such settlements. In the above descriptions, it is clear that it required attention, and yet the sort of care it needed is attainable through deliberate study. For the South American settlements, agility was key:

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51 C.T., *Advice.*
they needed to settle wherever they could, and tobacco’s vast cultivation range and negligible start-up costs accommodated this mobility. Crucially, the market for tobacco took off at the precise time that the English, French, and Dutch began to grow it, ultimately paving the way for permanent settlements. Prices remained high until the second quarter of the seventeenth century, when the trade faced the first of many gluts. By that time, many former tobacco colonies had turned to sugar. Meanwhile, cultivators, whether Spanish, indigenous, African, Dutch, French, Portuguese, or English, continued to make innovations to suit the expanding and increasingly discerning European market. They altered the traditional growing method, including more extensive curing, allowing fewer leaves per plant, planting in greater quantities, and beginning to implement a plantation labor regime.

In Philip Purcell’s Irish colony on the Amazon, established in 1612, settlers and indigenous groups were developing and sharing new knowledge about cultivation. Purcell was a tobacco trader who traveled to Trinidad in 1609. During his two-month stay, he heard stories about the Amazon and decided to start his own colony. Upon his return to England, he found partners and settlers, and the group chartered a Dutch ship. When the group arrived, they met with some native people, whom they then taught “to produce large quantities of tobacco, because the Indians only knew how to do it according to their own uncouth fashion, and not with the perfection with which it is produced in San Thome and in the manner in which this Captain Porcel saw it done in the Orinoco.” Europeans were starting to coalesce around a particular style of

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52 No known documents survive detailing how exactly Purcell recruited men and money for the colony, but accounts typically refer to the settlement as being Irish.

53 “Account of the Navigation, Settlement and Traffick which the Irish and English have carried out in the
tobacco, and they were introducing changes in production to accommodate this emerging preference.

Yet, the process was more complicated than Europeans developing a new method and passing it on to Indians. Cultivation was still unfamiliar to newcomers, and indigenous knowledge was essential. Many new colonies held the product and techniques of Trinidad, Venezuela, and Guiana in particularly high regard. The founding of the English colony on the island of Barbados illustrates this cooperation. When Henry Powell, the leader of the first settlers, arrived in 1627, Spanish slaving raids had long since depopulated the island of its indigenous inhabitants. After two weeks, Powell traveled to Essequibo, a Dutch tobacco colony in South America, where he sought out indigenous people from whom he could learn agriculture. Colonial sponsor William Courteen had financial and familial connections with the Dutch, particularly with Essequibo. Accordingly, it was probably planned beforehand that Powell would go there for initial help. He “sailed to the Maine upon the Coast of Guiana, and furnished himselfe with rootes, plants, fowles, tobacco seeds, sugger canes and other matterialls, together with thirty two Indians which hee carried to the said Iland for the Planting thereof.” Powell promised the Indians land for their own cultivation in exchange for sharing their skills. To establish Barbados, the settlers did not just need seeds and plants but also indigenous knowledge and labor.

River Amazon, 1621,” in *English and Irish Settlement,* 157. “San Thome” here refers to the Spanish settlement along the Orinoco.


55 Powell kept his promise to the Indians, though the land was later confiscated. Early maps of the island show where this ‘indian land’ was located. David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture and Environmental Change Since 1492* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 152-3.
Europeans sought information about cultivation in each new colony. Located far from any other island and the mainland, Bermuda was uninhabited when an English vessel shipwrecked there in 1609. The Virginia Company originally colonized the island, but under much different circumstances than Jamestown. Some colonial promoters thought Bermuda preferable because it was a small, easily controlled island with no native inhabitants. But there was no indigenous population from whom to learn what and how to plant, or from whom food might be acquired. The colonists had to figure out on their own which crops would grow and be profitable. As they did so, Bermudans repeatedly asked for help in the form of written instructions, experienced cultivators, and seeds and plants.

In *A Plaine Description of the Barmudas* (1613), the author wrote that the settlers, “have made a great deale of Tobacco, and if some would come that have skill in making it, it would bee very commodious both to the Merchant, and to the maker of it.”56 In a letter to his brother Nathaniel, Robert Rich, the family factor on Bermuda, mentioned his high hopes for indigo but admitted he did not know how to cultivate it. “I stand in great need of one whose judgment is better than my one, for the making of it. I pray you send mee the best derections by the nex ship.”57 Robert Rich and other Bermudans made careful observations about what they planted. “This last summer,” he wrote in February 1617, “we have made tryall of divers and sundry kinds of plants.”58 In another letter, Rich

56 Anonymous, *A Plaine Description of the Barmudas, now called Sommer Ilands* (London, 1613). This work is attributed to Silvester Jourdain.


includes a book recounting agricultural experiments he and two knowledgeable laborers had done.  

As tobacco became more widely available, Europeans quickly came to expect quality. Indigenous consumers would have distinguished good tobacco from bad, but since they used it locally, there was limited choice. By contrast, some Europeans paid a premium for the best tobacco. The idea that Spanish tobacco was superior, and that all other tobacco should be compared to it, confirms that cultivators sought to emulate Spanish practices. In the early seventeenth century, the quality of the Guiana crop was so well-known that “Trinidado” was synonymous with tobacco. Ralph Hamor defended Virginia’s fledgling tobacco industry by claiming it was as good as any from “west-Indie Trinidado or Cracus [Caracas].” A 1651 geographic work said that, in Virginia, “Their onely commodity is Tobacco, which I think to be more naturall to the Countrey then any other thing. The best sort is the sweet scented, which is not inferiour to the Spanish.” In fact, Virginia’s N. tabacum was not native. More surprising is that, even after Virginia supplied England with far more tobacco than the Spanish ever had exported, the author needed to explain that it was just as good.

As tobacco cultivation developed in diverse places, people made innovations to the process. Many indigenous and African cultivators toiled in obscurity, but Europeans who developed a skill sometimes received great rewards. Jean Roy came to the Caribbean in the early years of French colonization as an engagé, or indentured servant, and was a

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60 The first recorded reference in the Oxford English Dictionary is in 1599; Arthur Conan Doyle wrote the sentence “a pipe of Trinidado is all I require” in his 1889 novel Micah Clarke, set in 1685 England.


62 George Gardyner, A Description of the New World (London, 1651), 99.
tailor by trade. He became an expert in twisting tobacco into ropes and became rich enough to invest his money in sugar cultivation as the islands moved away from tobacco. By the time he died, probably in the early 1690s, he owned a sugar plantation and slaves on Martinique. In 1618, Samuel Argall wrote to the Virginia Company that “Mr Lambert has found out that Tobo cures better on lines than in heaps and desires lines be sent.” The identity of “Mr. Lambert” is not known, but his innovation was subsequently adopted by Virginian cultivators, who found that it helped the tobacco cure more evenly.

The Rise of the Plantation and African Labor and Knowledge

The introduction of the plantation system was the most striking and consequential change that Europeans introduced to tobacco agriculture, one that came to define early modern empires. In the tropical and semitropical climates of the Americas, the plantation complex developed into large tracts cultivated by enslaved laborers devoted to a single crop for export. The plantation had ancient precedents, and sugar was cultivated on Mediterranean plantations but with limited use of slave labor. The first step toward the modern plantation occurred in 1419 when the Portuguese rediscovered the island of Madeira. They imported enslaved Canary Islanders and later Africans to grow sugar. Madeira and other Atlantic islands were laboratories for later developments in the Americas.

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The expansion of tobacco agriculture coincided with increased reliance upon African labor. The first plantations used indigenous cultivators who naturally had experience with the crop. By the third decade of the seventeenth century, they more frequently employed white indentured servants before turning almost exclusively to enslaved Africans. Illustrations from contemporary works on tobacco cultivation demonstrate this transformation. Early images closely identify the crop with indigenous labor and culture. Andre Thevet's images of the Americas include Indians smoking and growing tobacco. Those from Johann Neander's *Tabacologia*, one of the earliest works devoted solely to tobacco, also depict indigenous cultivation, including curing. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, images of tobacco more frequently depicted African laborers.

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Blackburn, *Making of New World Slavery*. 

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Figure 15: Images of indigenous cultivation regularly depict smoking. From André Thevet, Les Singularitez des France Antartique, (Antwerp, 1575).

Figure 16: Images of Africans cultivating tobacco tend to be centered upon labor alone and might also include a white overseer, as shown here. From Description de l'univers (1686).
As Richard Rich experimented with tobacco and other crops on Bermuda, some African cultivators became renowned for their expertise. In 1616, a ship left Bermuda to procure plants and laborers from the Caribbean. It returned with two captives, an Indian and an African, who perhaps came from coastal Margarita Island. Dozens of Hispanic Africans and twenty-nine Angolan Africans, who might have had experience growing tobacco because it had been introduced and cultivated there, arrived on the island by 1621. In 1617, Richard Rich tried to buy one particular Hispanic African from another planter due to “his judgment in the cureing of tobackoe.” He wrote to his brother in

67 Jarvis, In the Eye of All Trade, 26-7.
England, who controlled the family finances: “I intreat you to procure mee a neger whose name is Francisco. Hee is one [of] the generall; his judgment in the cureing of tobackoe is such that I had rather have him than all the other negers that bee here.”

The Bermudans gave Francisco and another Hispanic African, James, their own plots of land on which they grew tobacco with their wives. Their production far outpaced that of the English settlers.

Virginia and Bermuda began cultivating tobacco around the same time. Virginia, however, was a little bit slower to obtain enslaved laborers with the sorts of skills they needed. Virginia Indians grew a different strain of tobacco, *Nicotiana rustica*. Because of their distance from the Spanish Empire, they were unfamiliar with the changes in tobacco production that had happened there. Equally important, the English in Virginia were unable to build the same sort of alliances as settlers in South America and so did not benefit from their labor as they hoped they might. Consequently, Bermuda grew more tobacco than Virginia until 1625.

Although the exponential increase in New World slavery undoubtedly tightened the association with Africans and tobacco, Africans were familiar with its uses and cultivation before Europeans developed a labor regime linking slave labor with tobacco agriculture. As explained above, Africans were early adopters who consumed tobacco before Europeans. Consequently, even as early as 1620, there are records of tobacco cultivation and consumption in Africa. The map below charts every known record of it in Africa to that year. The presence of tobacco in many places at so early a date suggests

69 Ibid..

70 Jarvis, *Eye of All Trade*, 27.

71 Ibid., 28.
that even Africans who arrived in Upstart colonies from Africa as opposed to Spanish America might have already known to grow tobacco.

![Map of Africa showing references to tobacco before 1620](image)

**Figure 18: Map created by author**

The transition to African slavery, however, was contested. In Virginia, it only supplanted indentured servitude after many years. The most frequent argument against it in the early seventeenth century came from those who reasoned that the colonies were a place to send their country’s deserving poor, and that the use of African slaves undermined free labor. Willem Usselincx argued against it on the basis that the enslaved would never become consumers, thus producing wealth for their masters but contributing little to the larger economy. With respect to tobacco cultivation, C.T. argued it strained the link with indigenous cultivators, whose methods were superior. “The naturall colour
of Tobacco is a deepe yellow, or light tawnie,” he writes, and when it is purchased “of the naturall people,” is has “no other complexion.” Tobacco prepared by enslaved Africans, however, is black like them, he observed. C.T.’s logic was perhaps unusual, and it did not win the day, but it demonstrates just how strongly tobacco was linked with indigenous cultivators.

Continued Indigenous Influence

By the eighteenth century, Europeans widely believed that Native Americans were savages who had a questionable right to the land because they had failed to cultivate it. While some indigenous groups of the Americas were nomadic or semi-nomadic, this characterization overlooked the agricultural debt that colonizers owed many indigenous groups. Everywhere they settled, Europeans had initially relied upon Indians for food and botanical knowledge. The link between Indians and cultivation was broken further because enslaved Africans increasingly grew cash crops. The connection with Indians was never entirely settled, however. Smoking tobacco retained the exotic allure that first drew Europeans to it, even as Indian groups were increasingly absent from sites (as well as images) of large-scale production.

In some places, however, ties with indigenous agriculture remained. What colonists had learned from Indians about cultivating tobacco persisted, too. In his description of Virginia in the 1640s, historian Edmund S. Morgan reveals both the complexities involved in planting tobacco and the degree to which English colonists had thoroughly adapted Indian agricultural systems. Their work was lightened by their

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72 C.T., Advice.
adoption of “the Indians’ easy manner of agriculture.” English settlers “adapted their tobacco farming to the Indians’ primitive but labor-saving system: clear a field by girdling the trees, plant it to tobacco for three or four years, to wheat or corn for a few more, and then clear another stretch and let the first recover its fertility by reverting to forest.” By the end of the eighteenth century, Virginians abandoned these methods, in part because of criticism from English agricultural reformers. Indigenous farming methods continued to have prominent advocates, however, including Thomas Jefferson.

From the sixteenth to the late eighteenth century, tobacco production altered dramatically. Africans had long cultivated tobacco on European-owned plantations in the Americas. And yet, a 1782 book written in German, perhaps by a Dutch grower, asserted that, “we learned how to plant tobacco...from the Indians.” It is very unlikely that the author personally learned from an Indian, but much of the book is devoted to explaining how Indian cultivators arranged their crops and prepared their soil.

By the end of the seventeenth century, tobacco cultivation had undergone a dramatic evolution. Much of the world consumed it, not only in places on the Atlantic Ocean, but in parts of the Middle East and China as well. Tobacco was grown in places where few indigenous people remained. In their place, enslaved Africans were the new arbiters of the crop—the ones who watched carefully in the tobacco house to determine the precise moment that it was dry, but not too dry, the ones who knew just where to cut the plant and how to string up the leaves.

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74 Ibid., 141-2.

75 Unterricht vom einländischen Tabacksbau (c. 1782) [Uncatalogued, in the collection of the John Carter Brown Library, Providence, Rhode Island].
But an even more drastic change had taken place alongside that one. The English, French, and Dutch had gone from being interlopers in the Americas, engaging mostly in piracy and relatively small-time illicit trade, to having empires of their own. These two developments were not coincidental. Rather, tobacco cultivation enabled the Upstart Empires to establish colonies in the Americas. The subject of the rest of this dissertation is how exactly they went from trading tobacco with Spanish settlers on the edge of empire, to attempting to do it themselves in short-lived colonies, to producing the crop in permanent colonies on vast plantations.
Chapter Three

From Golden Dreams to Smoky Schemes:
Guiana and Trinidad, 1498-1620

The Orinoco River, the second longest in South America, cuts through Venezuela, dividing the country in half. Its source, in the Parima Mountains on the Brazilian border, was not explored by non-indigenous peoples until 1951. The entire length of the river is riddled with rapids, making exploration and long-distance trade difficult. From its source, it winds northwest, then northeast, in a C-shaped arc, spawning dozens of wide rivers and small streams. Its western banks are bordered by llanos, plains that flood annually, which made agriculture impossible until the modern era. To the east is the Guiana Highlands, the range that includes the dramatic Angel Falls. The highlands are part of the Guiana Shield, an ecologically mega-diverse place with vast tracts of undisturbed rainforests. Over one thousand miles downriver, the Orinoco sprawls into a wide delta, splitting into hundreds of rivers that empty into the Caribbean Sea across from the island of Trinidad. This forms an archipelago with changing contours shaped by the ebb and flow of the river.

This region is above all diverse—in plants, animals, and landscapes. Likewise, local indigenous groups followed a diversity of leaders, subscribed to different beliefs, and organized themselves into a constellation of political units. Crucially, the varied landscape dictated that each had an economic specialization. The Warao people lived then, as they do today, in the watery delta. Their name means “canoe builder,” and they
were renowned ship makers and carpenters. The sixteenth-century Spanish conquistador Alonso Ojeda named the land Venezuela, little Venice, after their stilted houses. Further inland, the Arawaks specialized in making a type of flour. The inland Caribs, who lived along the Orinoco, were warriors and traders who distributed goods to the coast. Occasionally, from far into the rugged interior, they brought gold. Because different tribes specialized in the production of diverse goods, agriculturally marginal places nonetheless were home to chieftaincies that made other valuable items, like poisons or jewelry. Tribes that lived on fertile land typically grew a surplus of food to trade for these goods. Many of them called this land they shared “Guiana,” land of many rivers. The groups did not always get along, and they had traditions of war and raiding, but they depended upon one another economically.¹

The Spanish could not effectively conquer Guiana, nor did they initially want to.² These two realities are not mutually exclusive, but in Guiana, they were two sides of the same coin. Because Guiana was comprised of numerous individual tribes, connected to one another in a web of cooperation and antagonism, would-be conquistadors could not


² In this chapter “Guiana” refers to the land from about the Orinoco to the Amazon. Sixteenth and seventeenth century Europeans had a poor understanding of its geography and so they did not have fixed ideas about the boundaries or the extent of this region. Thus, I use the term loosely, as they did. Today, places that they called “Guiana” comprise parts of Venezuela and Brazil, as well as the countries we call “The Guianas”—French Guiana, Suriname, and Guyana. The term “Trinidad y Guayana” is used to describe the Spanish province initially organized under the governorship of Antonio de Berrio, which comprised Trinidad and parts of eastern Venezuela and had an indeterminate eastern border. Spanish sources refer to the area as “Guayana,” and so that spelling is occasionally used here, too. “Venezuela” is used in this dissertation to describe places that are part of present-day Venezuela. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Venezuela was sometimes used to describe Caracas, but it was also a term for the collection of provinces roughly corresponding to present-day Venezuela.
repeat the successes others had in centralized states like Mexico and Peru. An unexpected lesson of the Spanish conquest: empires are easier to conquer than tribes. But because the Guiana tribes were decentralized, the area yielded no immediate treasures. Conquistadors found no grand cities, no extensive native tribute system, no tested method of extracting labor. There were some easily obtained natural resources, like pearls from the coastal islands. A small island was easy enough to take, and so the pearl beds were nearly depleted in a few decades. On the mainland the Spanish saw diverse tribes, but they all looked impoverished, except for some beautiful gold work. The mysterious interior was intriguing but initially passed over for easier conquests.

From first colonization effort in the 1520s until well into the eighteenth century, the region that constitutes modern-day Venezuela, Trinidad, and the Guianas was sparsely settled and marginal to the Spanish Empire. Consequently, it was a target for northern European adventurers looking to get involved in American trade and eventually settlement. Spanish colonists were often complicit in this illegal trade because their own ships rarely visited. The area was also the site of a centuries-long search for El Dorado, a golden city rumored to be somewhere in the impenetrable interior.

Geography precludes some opportunities while inviting others. Today, the stretch of South America that Europeans called Guiana is home to nations first colonized by the Spanish, English, French, Dutch, and Portuguese. The land, its residents, and its visitors have all suffered from a simplistic, if intriguing, reputation. Spanish documents tell a story of a beleaguered colony with great potential but perpetually beset by pirates. Dutch sources carefully enumerate the area’s weaknesses, detailing how it could be easily taken and settled. The most famous work in English describes Amazon women, men with faces
on their chests, and the glittering land of El Dorado. Reading these sources, it is easy to accept the obvious narratives about Guiana: that it reveals the Spanish Empire as bound to fail; that it was a place that attracted the foolhardy who preferred to search for golden cities than create a colony; and that it was a haven for pirates.

But these sources can tell a more complicated and interesting story. This chapter will argue that Guiana’s past shaped its future. Instead of seeing a lack of Spanish influence as a failure that allowed pirates and interlopers to move in, I will show how all the groups in the area—Caribs, Arawaks, Spaniards, Dutch, English, French, and others—were enmeshed in a web of assistance, obligation, and knowledge-sharing that had pre-Colombian roots. Before Europeans arrived, Guiana’s terrain ensured that no one group could dominate, that all had to cooperate. When first the Spanish and later other Europeans came to the area, they largely conformed to those expectations. The Spanish settlers splintered into antagonistic factions and they maintained complex indigenous alliances, at times cooperating even with the Caribs, their supposed enemies. Later, northern Europeans arrived in small numbers that facilitated their integration. Some claimed to serve “the great cacique of the north,” who was an enemy of the Spanish, and they also participated in their hosts’ wars with neighboring tribes.³

Recognizing the ways in which the Guianas’ pre-Columbian history and geography influenced subsequent events helps to clarify the myths that have grown up around the region. The long, fruitless search for El Dorado makes more sense if one understands it as part of a belief with a basis in indigenous geography, supported by a conquistador worldview. Spanish settlers making alliances with indigenous groups and

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trading with Northern Europeans while plotting against their fellow settlers conforms to the pre-existing political geography of the area, where small groups maintained a constellation of alliances, even with enemies. Considering the history of the Guianas with the benefit of hindsight, it might seem that Spanish settlers and indigenous groups helped Northern Europeans immensely and in return, ceded territory to them that they wanted for themselves. This chapter will contextualize these decisions and demonstrate how, at least in the short term, these relationships seemed beneficial to all. Previous scholarship on the region has paid particular attention to the Carib-Dutch alliance, but the present work extends the line of inquiry to include the Spanish, English, French, Portuguese, and indigenous groups including the Arawaks, Yao, Sepoyo and others. All of these groups were present in the Guianas and the actions of each were often calculated in anticipation of what another might do. Thus, this broader consideration is necessary, especially for the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, when all these groups contested the space.

Tobacco was at the center of many interactions among these various groups. It was one of the first American goods that Northern Europeans sought. They often obtained it from cultivators on independent Caribbean islands, especially Dominica and St. Lucia. Eventually, Spanish colonists, in imitation of the economic activity of their indigenous neighbors, started growing it expressly for trade with Northern Europeans, in direct violation of Spanish laws. By the early years of the seventeenth century, a dozen foreign ships or more might be spotted at once in a Trinidad port. A prolonged familiarity with the area eventually led some Northern Europeans to grow tobacco of their own with

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the help of Indian allies. All of this activity eventually caught the attention of the Spanish
Crown, and from roughly 1605-1615, they curtailed the tobacco trade and even
depopulated some of the coastal settlements. By that time many of the Dutch, English,
and French who had been involved in the trade had already moved on to more permanent
settlements, but Guiana was crucial to their later success.

First European Encounters

On July 31, 1498, during Christopher Columbus’s third voyage, his crew spotted
an island with three mountains; he named it Trinidad, after the Christian trinity.
Approaching the island, he wrote that it had a good harbor, houses and was “as lovely
and green as the orchards of Valencia in March.”\(^5\) His efforts to assure the natives of his
goodwill with dancing and tambourine playing instead convinced them to draw their
bows. On the mainland, days later, he finally persuaded others that he came in peace. He
carefully noted that “many wore pieces of gold on their breasts, and some had pearls
around their arms. I rejoiced greatly when I saw those things.”\(^6\) The lands he found were
“the most lovely in the world, and very populous.” Columbus traveled along the coast of
Venezuela, inquiring after gold and pearls all the while. “I made great endeavours to
know where they collected that gold and they all indicated to me a land bordering on
them to the west, which was very lofty but not at a distance. But all told me that I should
not go there, for there they ate men… Also I asked them where they gathered the pearls,

\(^5\) Christopher Columbus, *The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, ed. Cecil Jane (New York: Dover

and they also indicated that it was to the westward and to the north, beyond this land."\(^7\)

Columbus marveled at the amount of fresh water gushing out of the Orinoco, convinced that earthly paradise was nearby.

Despite Columbus’s fascination with coastal Venezuela, the region was never the focus of colonization. The Spanish conquest instead began on Caribbean islands. Soon depleted of their resources and native population, by the early sixteenth century colonists had bypassed these islands in favor of Mexico and Peru. During the Caribbean phase of the conquest, the Spanish imposed a structure of governance on Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Hispaniola. They had cities, an *Audiencia*, and a substantial (if diminishing) European population.\(^8\) By the late seventeenth century, the Spanish Caribbean was economically depressed, but they were still on the route of the silver fleets and thus had regular contact with Spain. The islands provisioned these ships and had access to trade goods as a result.\(^9\)

The Spanish colonized Venezuela just after the major Caribbean islands, but settlement there began just as imperial attention shifted away to Mexico and Peru. They passed it over before founding any cities or sending consequential numbers of settlers.

Unlike the Caribbean islands, it was isolated, too far from the new centers of colonization. In 1528, the Spanish King Charles V (who was also Holy Roman Emperor) underscored eastern Venezuela’s marginality by granting the German Welser family

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\(^8\) The Spanish strove to create New World societies that mimicked the ones they had left behind. Early Modern Spain was very urban, so colonists founded “cities,” even when they were far too small to live up to the name. The *Real Audiencia* (literally “Royal Audience,” usually just called *Audiencia*), or appellate court, was another hallmark of Spanish governance. The marginality of Venezuela is reflected in the fact that, rather than having its own *Audiencia*, its provinces were overseen by the far-off *Audiencia* of Santo Domingo, even as later-colonized areas were given *Audiencias* of their own. In 1739, an *Audiencia* was established in Bogotá.

colonization rights. Rather than establishing any sort of permanent structures, the German governors concerned themselves with raiding for slaves and searching for mines. By the late sixteenth century, the western Venezuelan highlands had slipped into the orbit of settlements in New Granada (modern-day Colombia). On the coast near Caracas, colonists started growing wheat and cacao, but the region remained marginal, infrequently visited by ships. Beyond these settlements, in eastern Venezuela and into Guiana, were places Europeans knew very little about, yet which the Spanish claimed.

Reports of the pearl-adorned Indians Columbus encountered led to the first continuous Spanish settlement in the region on the tiny islands of Margarita and Cubagua. By the early sixteenth century, the Spanish set up pearl mining concerns where they forced first natives and then Africans to dive for pearls. Some Spanish and Portuguese founded small settlements on the mainland and in present-day eastern Venezuela. The pearl islands had poor soil, so the Maragariteños traded for food and even water. They also needed occasionally to raid for indigenous slaves to keep the pearl industry afloat. Following a precedent set by earlier Caribbean settlers, they allied themselves with the Arawaks. The Arawaks received trade goods from the Spanish to

10 The Welsers were an Augsburg-based banking and merchant family that rose to power in the sixteenth century by financing monarchs. Bartholomeus V. Welser lent Charles V a large sum of money, and received Venezuela (Klein-Venedig) as security. Welser was obliged to spend his own money and obey certain conditions, like only sending Spanish and Flemish colonists. The patent to colonize was revoked in 1546. Lockhart and Schwartz, Early Latin America, 283-4.

11 In histories of the Americas, the frontier is usually to the west but in this case it was to the southeast.

12 For more on the pearl islands from their establishment to their decline in the mid-sixteenth century, see Enrique Otte, Las perlas del Caribe: Nueva Cadiz de Cubagua (Caracas: Fundación Boulton, 1977). For an example of Spanish colonists fighting with the crown for the continued right to use indigenous technology in pearl harvesting, see Molly A. Warsh, “A Political Ecology in the Early Spanish Caribbean,” The William and Mary Quarterly 71, no. 4 (2014): 517-48.

13 Arawaks and Caribs, peoples typically associated with the Caribbean, were also present on the mainland. Anthropologists debate about group belonging and identity among wide-flung groups, though some basic
distribute inland and in exchange provided the colonists with slaves and food. Despite their Arawak alliance, the settlers also traded with the Caribs for gold. In doing so, they adapted to the region’s pre-existing trade patterns.¹⁴

But the Spanish were not just another tribe. Though their presence was slight for decades, their intrusion into the area was significant. It disrupted existing economic patterns and alliances and changed their geographic orientation. Europeans, whose primary objective was resource extraction, tended to settle along coasts and the lower stretches of rivers. Trade had previously been oriented towards the mountains, but the center shifted. The European presence in the region led to a geographic redirection, toward the coast and away from the interior. This made the hinterland more mysterious to Europeans and heightened its allure. Time after time they set out into the interior in search of El Dorado, but the environment and its inhabitants rebuffed them. For another three and a half centuries, the region would not completely reveal its secrets to any non-indigenous peoples.

The Spanish-Arawak alliance also changed the relationship among tribes. The number of Indians identifying as Arawak perhaps even grew. With the littoral ascendant,
the Arawaks, now stronger than many of their rivals, seized coastal land. This annexation forced coastal tribes to the east, putting them in the path of the Caribs.\textsuperscript{15} Though traditionally traders, Caribs had limited access to European goods. The Caribs, who lived just inland, became resolutely anti-Spanish and helped confine European settlement to the coast.\textsuperscript{16}

The connection between the Arawaks and the Spanish on Margarita Island was supported by something stronger than just beneficial trade. The Spanish settlers there also believed their alliance were born in a mingling of the two cultures. The celebrated conquistador Diego de Ordás received permission from the Crown to explore the interior of Venezuela. In 1531, he set out in five ships, with 600 men and 36 horses to explore the region between the Amazon and the Orinoco. Ordás had been a captain to Hernán Cortés and saw the magnificent riches of Mexico City before its destruction. He witnessed how relatively easy the conquest had been and wanted the same thing for himself. Ordás subscribed to a belief, current at the time, that sources of gold were put by God in places closest to the sun, along the equator. He thought such a lode would be at the headwaters of the Orinoco.\textsuperscript{17}

Soon after Ordás set out from Spain, storms scattered his ships, one by one. Ordás finally reunited weeks later with some of his men on the mainland just opposite Trinidad.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[15] Whitehead, \textit{Lords of the Tiger Spirit}, 18
\item[17] An early written account of Ordás’s expedition comes from 1626 and is by the priest Pedro Simón, a longtime resident of Colombia and an important early chronicler of its indigenous peoples, especially the Muiscas. Pedro Simón, \textit{Noticias historiales de las conquistas de Tierra Firme en las Indias occidentales} v. 1 (Bogotá, 1882). See also Ojer, \textit{La Formacion}. Ralegh also talks about Ordás in the \textit{Discoverie}.
\end{footnotes}
There, some of them told him that a group had taken a smaller craft along the river into the interior but had not returned. Ordás never discovered their fate. After a difficult expedition, he became ill and died on his way back to Spain. The area was not home to the gilded Mexico-like kingdom Ordás had expected, but news of his failed journey over rough landscapes only encouraged those who subscribed to his belief about locations of gold. The Jesuit missionary Jose Acosta argued God did put gold in inhospitable places in order to spread true religion: “A father with an ugly daughter gives her a large dowry to marry her; and this is what God did with that difficult land, giving it much wealth in mines so that by this means he would find someone who wanted it.”

The Margarita settlers did not forget Ordás’s lost men either. In 1545, a slave who had fled to live among the Arawaks years before returned to Margarita Island. As he and his group approached the settlers, the Margariteños noticed that many of the Arawaks looked like mestizos. The mystery of *la gente perdida*, the lost men, was solved. They had settled inland and intermarried with the Arawaks in the province of the *cacique* Carvana. The Margariteños believed that some of the Arawaks were part Spanish, and their alliance was strengthened. The Arawaks left their sons on the island to learn Spanish—the governor hosted the son of a *cacique* for two years. They came together.

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19 A belief that previously “lost” explorers lived just beyond European settlement was used in various times and places to offer justification for further expansion. The 1776 Dominguez-Escalante expedition, which attempted to find an overland route from Santa Fe, New Mexico to Monterey, California, was also propelled by the search for a long-lost group of Spaniards rumored to be living just beyond the Colorado River. My thanks go to Caitlin Connelly, whose undergraduate thesis alerted me to this parallel. Caitlin Connelly, “Intent to Conquer: Reconsidering the Motives of the Rivera and Dominguez-Escalante Expeditions,” (Senior Thesis, Gettysburg College, 2017). Yet, the Venezuelan historian Pablo Ojer argues that some of Ordás men likely did wind up among the Arawaks. Ojer, *La Formacion*, 166-172; Walter Ralegh, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana*, ed. Neil L. Whitehead (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 139, n. 27.
regularly to trade, and during these festive gatherings, the settlers on Margarita pressed
the Arawaks for tales of the interior. By the late sixteenth century, the Margariteños
represented an older faction of Spanish settlers, who had strong trade networks, even with
enemy Caribs. In one telling letter about their alliance, a Spaniard used the Arawak word
for friend, guatiao, to describe the relationship.20

Around the same time, non-Iberian Europeans began to frequent places along the
South American coast east of Colombia. Their initials visits were an extension of the
raiding and illicit trading that became increasingly common in the Caribbean over the
sixteenth century.21 The area, however, presented them with unique opportunities. Some
ships came to the area to take advantage of its natural resources. Dutch ships in particular
came to the saltpans near Punta de Araya, on the mainland between Cumaná and
Margarita Island. They stopped so frequently, especially after they were cut out of the
Spanish salt trade after 1598, that one Spanish colonist wrote to the King with an
elaborate plan to poison the saltpans.

Other expeditions to the area came with the intent to attack Spanish settlements.
This was especially the case on Margarita Island, which in the second half of the
sixteenth century was attacked several times by pirates looking to steal pearls.22 The
English pirate John Hawkins often attacked Margarita and nearby islands. At least as

20 Ojer, La Formación, 165.
21 In this period, privateers in the Caribbean typically went to the islands of the Greater Antilles for illicit
trade, small prizes, and raids onshore. They also sought out lone ships in the Caribbean in the hope that
they carried valuable goods. The coast from the pearl islands west to Rio de la Hacha, or even Cartagena,
was a riskier but potentially lucrative endeavor and was attempted by larger ships. See English Privateering
Voyages to the West Indies, 1588-1595, ed. Kenneth R. Andrews, Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society 111
22 English attacks on Spanish settlements were more common during the Anglo-Spanish War, 1585-1604.
early as 1586, the settlers sought to erect a fort to protect the pearl fisheries, but they needed assistance from the crown in order to do it. In April of 1587, the cabildo of Margarita Island wrote to alert the King of their increasingly dire situation. The month before, corsairs had captured “six or seven” Spanish ships in the water between Margarita and Caracas. More recently than in past years, many had died; parts of the island were in ruins. The colonists, however, claimed to be optimistic all the same. “The only thing as great as the evils done to us by the corsairs is our belief that Your Majesty will remedy it.” This belief, which “gave them strength in their suffering,” was unfounded. In October of 1591 alone, they reported that thirty enemy ships came near the island. The governor, Juan Sarmiento de Villandandro, wrote that although his people constantly defended the coast with “weapons in hand,” they had not received any new munitions from Spain during his tenure in office. An English account of a 1593 attack on Margarita Island, in which a group of English privateers fought off three times as many Spaniards chalked it up to the English sailors’ bravery. Conveniently, though, “the Spanyards weapons were broken.” Later that year, Villandandro was killed in a fight with either an English or Dutch ship. Settlements all along the coast likewise complained of piracy, though Margarita Island’s pearl beds made it the most tempting.

Despite, or maybe because of, these hardships, colonists from Margarita and other older settlements occasionally explored the interior. Several missions went out from

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23 Ojer, La Formacion, 359. Other provinces also repeatedly sought funds to build forts in this period: Archivo General de Indias (hereafter AGI) Santo Domingo 201, Tomo I, n. 33, “Petición de Caracas para la fábrica de un fuerte,” 20 abril 1598.
24 AGI Santo Domingo 182, f. 16, “Carta del cabildo de Margarita a S.M.” 7 Abril 1587.
25 Ojer, La Formacion, 359.
Cumaná, the easternmost settlement. Yet they had no claim to most of the mainland because of sparse settlement and lackluster forays into the interior.\textsuperscript{27} The crown and colonists alike had a poor grasp of Guiana’s geography, so claims often overlapped and conflicted. The crown awarded would-be conquistadors the right to \textit{encomiendas} on the mainland, including to areas other governors considered under their jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{28}

One such patent-holder was Gonzalez Jiménez de Quesada, an intellectual and a conquistador upon whom Cervantes may have modeled Don Quixote. In 1536, Quesada led an expedition that left from Santa Marta, northeast of Cartagena de Indias, to find the source of the Magdalena River. Despite losing scores of men to diseases, animals, and warfare, Quesada’s expedition recouped its losses by conquering the Muisca Indians of the central Andean highlands.\textsuperscript{29} During the year-long subjugation, the Spaniards learned a lot about the people. They had elaborate goldwork but, like the tribes of coastal Venezuela, had no goldmines. Instead, they had a myth of a gilded prince who sailed into a lake. The stories of the Muisca stayed with Quesada and his men as they tried to find the source of the river, and now also the gold. Eventually, Quesada determined that it might be further east and was granted a patent to explore Venezuela. In 1569, he led an expedition out from Santa Fé de Bogotá, which he had founded, to the Orinoco. He left with over two thousand men and returned three years later with about thirty. Quesada fell deeply in debt and caught leprosy. When he died in 1579, his \textit{encomienda} passed to his

\textsuperscript{27} There were many attempts by a number of people to find El Dorado. For more see Hemming, \textit{Search for El Dorado}.

\textsuperscript{28} An \textit{encomienda} was a grant from the Spanish Crown that awarded a colonist the right to demand labor and/or tribute from Indians living in a particular area. In return, the \textit{encomendero} was responsible for their well being and instruction in Christianity.

\textsuperscript{29} The Muisca were a Chibca-speaking group.
niece’s husband, Antonio de Berrío, whose actions started a new phase in colonization, in the search for El Dorado, and in the history of the region.30

*El Dorado and Guiana*

Antonio de Berrío was a soldier. Before he embarked on his journey to the Indies, he fought in Germany, Barbary, Italy, and the Low Countries. He married late, and was fifty-three when he first came to the Americas with his wife and young children. He later wrote that when he arrived in Guiana, he had wanted to rest, as anyone his age would. However, a clause of Quesada’s will required him to search for El Dorado. And, even if he took up the task reluctantly, de Berrío soon became consumed with the chase.

On his first expedition, which left in 1583, he marshaled “a great number” of cows, horses, men, and guns—all the things he thought they would need in their new home—and set out from Bogotá. They “crossed the llanos… where no Spaniard before had entered.” Crossing the plains was easy, but the group failed to find a path in or around the Andes.31 The men became sick, then delirious, and the Indians plotted against them. Seventeen months after they set out, they turned back. On his second expedition, a

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31 Antonio de Berrío to the King, January 1, 1593, in *British Guiana Boundary Arbitration with the United States of Venezuela. The Case on Behalf of... Her Britannic Majesty* (London, 1898), App. I, no. 1. This collection of primary sources was created using the archives of the Dutch, English, and Spanish empires in the 1890s, as British Guiana and Venezuela fought over where the boundary between their countries should be. Both sides turned to historical records to demonstrate a continued presence along the boundary. The British sought to show that northern Europeans had a presence in the area very early, and thus that British Guiana (as the presumed heir to these incursions) had a greater claim to the region that had previously been established. These documents have been invaluable to my research, and to that of other scholars who work on the history of the Guianas.
captain mutinied and Berrío pursued him, chasing him around the plains for nearly two years. Upon his return, he found a letter from the King—could he set out again?

Berrío’s luck never improved. On his third attempt, which left in 1590, thirty-four of his men abandoned him, taking all the slaves and most of the horses. Thirty more died. He had decided this time to go by river instead, before all of his boats were destroyed. He tried walking along the Orinoco but got lost. The whole area was depopulated as a result of Carib raids, so they couldn’t ask anyone for directions or help. As Berrío worked on new canoes and contemplated killing the horses for meat, providence intervened: “God was pleased to send us guides, in the form of two pirogues of Caribs, who were stealing people for their cannibal feasts and food, and who came with me for presents.”

A Spanish colonist lost in the jungle saying that a group of cannibals had been sent by God highlights the unique political situation in Guiana in this period. Rather than being shocked by their cannibalism (if that is indeed what they were even up to), he was curious. He asked them why they would venture so far from home to find captives, when they could easily raid the Guyanese tribe nearby. The Caribs pointed out that the Guyanese “were numerous, and very near, and can make war.” When your group is small, even if you are very fierce, you have to get along with your neighbors. The Caribs and Berrío understood each on that point, at least. They boarded boats together, and sailed down the Orinoco. “We experienced much friendship,” he recalled.

Over the next several days, they traveled 350 leagues in dugout canoes. A couple of the Caribs came over to Berrío’s boat, and he sent one of his men over with them, an echo of the extended exchanges of people customary between the Spanish and indigenous

32 Ibid. A pirogue is a small boat.
33 Ibid.
groups. As they went, the Caribs told him “great secrets of the country” and confirmed what Berrío already knew: the interior was rich in gold. When the Caribs approached their stop, they went up another river. Heartened by his time with them, and convinced of their reliability, he gave the Caribs goods in return for their help and, incredibly, a packet of letters to deliver to Margarita.

This mention of a packet of letters is intriguing. While Berrío was in the middle of this third voyage to find El Dorado, tales of his exploits reached Caracas and Domingo de Vera, a wealthy colonist who also hoped to find great things in the interior. Berrío had spent his entire inheritance and the dowry for his seven young daughters on his quest for El Dorado. Vera was moved by Berrío, whose actions reminded him of something out of a classical tale. He agreed to help finance Berrío’s future exploits, and they decided that Trinidad, situated across the mouth of the Orinoco, would be key. In May of 1592, Vera performed the acts of possession on Trinidad and founded a city, San Josef de Oruña. He assembled the natives around him and read them a letter, penned by Berrío, which recounted his troubles. Vera took twenty-eight soldiers with him and Berrío found the money for fifty more. Also around this time, Berrío established an inland settlement, San Tomé, on an island in the Orinoco.34

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34 Antonio de Berrío to the King, in British Guiana Boundary, App. I, no. 2, and Domingo de Ybarguen to His Majesty, Island of Trinidad, October 27, 1597, in ibid., no. 7.
Figure 19: Location of San Tome and San Josef.

Map created by author.

Berrío thought that settling Trinidad would lead to discovering El Dorado. Instead, it caused a conflict with the governor of Margarita Island, Francisco de Vides, who claimed Trinidad based on its earlier Spanish settlement. Vides, supported by the Margariteños, disputed Berrío’s claims and petitioned the crown for his own patent to explore the area. Backed by one hundred and fifty men, Vides demanded Berrío give up the governorship to Trinidad, but he refused unless Vides presented him with an order from the King. “Margarita,” Berrío wrote Philip II, referring to Vides’s governorship, “is called the city of falsehood.”

Vides’ dramatic attempts to thwart Berrío show both the

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35 Antonio de Berrío to the King, January 1, 1593, in ibid..
tensions that had developed among Spanish factions and how indigenous alliances heightened them. Ultimately, they reveal how northern Europeans were able to take advantage of the political situation in Guiana.

Sometime during his third expedition, Berrio and his men stayed for six weeks with the indigenous leader Carapana, whom Europeans held in high regard. Carapana came from a place called Emeria, near the mouth of the Orinoco. His tribe had sent him as a child to live on Trinidad to escape fighting in his homeland, and had later traveled to Margarita and Cumaná. He had “seen many Christians both French and Spanish” and “noted the difference of the nations.” Because of this cosmopolitanism, Carapana endeavored to keep peace with all, even Caribs, which perhaps explains his efforts to work with the Spanish.36

Carapana assured Berrio that if he wanted to find Guiana, he should enlist the help of the cacique Morequito, who lived just five days’ journey from Guiana. Like Carapana, Morequito was well-traveled. A few years earlier, he had been to Margarita and Cumaná and had promised Vides that he could take him into the interior of Guiana. This guarantee was what had encouraged Vides to obtain his own, rival patent to find El Dorado. When Berrio finally found Morequito, he sent word to Vides and the Lieutenant-Governor of Cumaná, Luis Fajardo, to send more men. With Morequito’s help, he believed they might finally find El Dorado. For seven months, he waited for help, unaware that the three men had allied against him. Instead of coming to his aid, Fajardo raided a nearby village that had cooperated with Berrio and enslaved its residents. The

incident turned some Indians against Berrío, assuming he had been complicit in the attack.

Meanwhile, Morequito pretended to give Berrío assistance and sent a guide with a scout party of ten soldiers and a friar. The group had traveled for several days when Morequito’s men ambushed them, murdering all but one soldier, who “lived to bring the news.” Morequito fled to his allies in Cumaná, where he was discovered hiding at the home of Fajardo. Although Morequito had acted as he did in part because of his alliance with Vides, Vides was shocked by the murder of the priest and perhaps afraid of repercussions from the King, as the word came in that he had upheld Berrío’s patent. Morequito, betrayed by all, was executed.  

The death of Morequito and its consequences set the stage for one of the most dramatic events in the search for El Dorado: the arrival of Walter Ralegh in 1595. Arriving in Trinidad in March, Ralegh spent several days exploring the coasts before encountering a Spanish settlement. Rather than fight, they wanted to trade. Some came aboard Ralegh’s ship “to buy lynn… and other such things as they wanted.” Later that evening, two Indians came aboard. One of them, a cacique named Cantyman, knew Ralegh’s captain, Jacob Whiddon. Cantyman had a good relationship with Whiddon, or maybe just a poor one with the Spanish. He told them how strong the Spaniards were, where their city was, and where they could find Berrío, rumored at the time to be dead. Ralegh and his men also got intelligence from the Spaniards: “those poore souldiers having beeene many yeares without wine, a fewe draughtes made them merry, in which


38 Whiddon had explored the area the year before on behalf of Ralegh. Berrío promised eight of his men could safely come ashore to get water and wood, but they were ambushed and killed. Ralegh sought revenge. See *ibid.*, 135.
moode they vaunted of Guiana and the riches thereof, and all what they knew of the waies and passages." Most importantly, Ralegh learned about the geography and people of Guiana from Berrío himself. After leaving Trinidad, he sailed to San Tomé and kidnapped the governor. Next, he rallied nearby groups that were enemies of the Spanish, told them he served the cacique Elizabeth, and, “at the instance of the Indians,” burned the settlement.40

Ralegh’s experiences in Guiana were the products of a century of interaction between Europeans and indigenous groups. He benefitted from a long Spanish presence in the area which led to a particular diplomatic alignment that facilitated his entry. Moreover, Ralegh built upon the knowledge and beliefs about the area held by Spanish and indigenous peoples alike and crafted them to his own purposes in his narrative. Neil Whitehead has shown that Ralegh’s account, though presented as a “discovery,” in fact shows indigenous people as “sophisticated actors,” well-acquainted with the political and economic strategies of Europeans.41 Crucially, Ralegh was also able to take advantage of the fallout of the death of the cacique Morequito, which had made indigenous groups living along the Orinoco angry with both sides of the Spanish factions. When Ralegh met with Topiawari, his followers presented the English with food “in great plenty,” wine, and a curious armadillo as a present.42 Ralegh told the old King (reportedly aged 110) that he had made the voyage in order to deliver Topiawari’s people from both the Spanish

39 Ibid., 132-3
40 Ibid., 134.
42 Ibid., 172-3.
and their indigenous enemies, the Epuremei. To strengthen their alliance, Ralegh took Topiawari’s son with him and left two young men with the King.43

Similarly, Ralegh himself was not an explorer venturing into the unknown, but a careful student. The text of the Discoverie shows how much he had read about the Spanish Empire. He had sent Whiddon out to learn about the area the year before. His “Indian interpreter” came with the group from England, and presumably Ralegh had learned a lot from him beforehand. When he finally arrived in the area, he took in indigenous and Spanish accounts, and his ideas about El Dorado were shaped by local oral traditions, most especially the Margariteño belief that the Caroni River was the gateway to the golden city.44 Lastly, Ralegh drew on his own experiences in the Americas; he had been involved in colonization plans in Virginia since 1584. The result, a book based in part on a mythical land, is nonetheless a fairly accurate account of Guiana’s land, people, and recent history.

Ralegh published The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana in 1596. Four English editions were printed that year. By 1600, translations appeared in Latin, German, and Dutch. Fearful of losing the territory to interlopers, the Spanish sent more settlers, but still Dutch, English, and French traders came. The encounter of Berrío and Ralegh was also an ending. It helped to bring about things both men wanted—more support for Spanish settlement in Venezuela and more English ships to Guiana. But the new European settlers and traders had entirely different aims from

43 Ibid., 181. One of the men Ralegh left behind was reportedly eaten by a jaguar while the other was captured and taken to Margarita, where he was questioned. For a Spanish account of their fate, see: Don Roques de Montes to the King of Spain, April 18, 1596, in British Guiana Boundary, App. I no. 5.

44 Whitehead, “Introduction,” Ralegh, Discoverie, 19; Ojer, La Formacion, 496-7.
their predecessors. They were no longer looking for El Dorado. Instead, they looked to
develop the area’s real, not mythical, resources.

By 1600, non-Iberian ships in the Caribbean were increasingly coming to trade
rather than to plunder. This change was for various reasons, some of them nationally
specific. As explained in Chapter One, Dutch ships rarely went to the Americas in the
sixteenth century. Instead, they had firmly established their role as merchants in the
Baltic, Mediterranean, and even in the Canaries and Cape Verde islands. By 1560, they
had an estimated eight hundred to one thousand merchant ships, with thirty thousand
sailors—twice that of England. Until that time, the Netherlands was under the Hapsburg
crown, and so Dutch ships regularly went to Spanish ports. In 1568, several of the
provinces revolted, seeking to win independence from Spain. Still, the Spanish had no
way to replace them, and so they continued to come. In the 1580s, when the Spanish
began to arrest Dutch ships for hauling salt from Spanish ports, the Dutch started to seek
alternative ways to get not just salt, but American goods. Dutch merchants increasingly
sent ships to the Americas. Some prominent Dutch merchants argued that the fight for
independence might be won overseas.

A contract for an early trip, from 1598, went first to Guinea.45 While Spanish and
Portuguese ships could break up the transatlantic trip by stopping in the Atlantic islands
they owned, Dutch ships often elected to go to West Africa to resupply before crossing
the Atlantic at its shortest distance. From there, the ship was required to go to the West
Indies, and not to venture too far south on either continent. Once in the Indies though, the
itinerary was less concrete: “sail to and fro, loading and unloading as necessary.” The

45 Stadsarchief Amsterdam (hereafter SAA), Notarial Archief, 80/74v 22 April 1598.
only specific cargo the ship was asked to get was salt. That same year, Abraham Cabeliau was on the first Dutch voyage into Guiana where he found indigenous groups who, in the wake of Ralegh’s voyage, were willing to align themselves with Dutch and English ships. Within a few years, the Dutch had regular trade with Guiana, Margarita, and other places along the Venezuelan coast.

The role of the French in the Americas also changed at this time. The French were involved in the Americas far earlier and much more extensively than England or the Netherlands. By the 1550s they had explored and established forts in places as far-flung as Canada, Florida, and Brazil and had become a commercial presence in the Caribbean from the 1560s. They most commonly traded linen and probably enslaved Africans for hides. French activity in the Americas was fueled by conflict, internal and external. It was sanctioned by French kings at war with Spain but often carried out by Protestants who sought to escape religious conflict at home. The French paid particular attention to Brazil, where they cultivated alliances with the Tupinambá. After the French made peace with Spain in 1598, they focused their colonization efforts on places where the Spanish (and the Portuguese, then under the same crown) had no claim. The unsettled area between Brazil and Trinidad became the focus of their efforts. In 1602, Henry IV commissioned René Montbarrot to settle the area and Montbarrot sent a Huguenot, Daniel de La Ravardière, to explore it. This French presence along the coast, though


47 British Library (hereafter BL) Sloane MS 173 f. 2 “Copy of a patent given by Henri IV for the planting
minor, nonetheless worked to attract more commercial interest to the Spanish settlements to the east.

The English also increased their presence in the area in the wake of Ralegh’s voyage. Because the English had been at war with Spain, they imported a lot of American goods by seizing cargo from ships in the east Atlantic. In fact, Spanish goods from the colonies were reported to be cheaper in England than in Spain.\textsuperscript{48} In 1596, Ralegh sent Lawrence Keymis on a second expedition to the area, where he discovered that the Spanish had rebuilt the town he burnt and had new colonists.\textsuperscript{49} Ralegh’s vision of an English empire in Guiana was unobtainable, but the voyages he sent there encouraged commercial enterprise in the region.

This period was also one of great change for indigenous groups. Although Guiana did not experience the dramatic population decrease as early as other places, the European presence forever altered indigenous identity and native polities. An alliance with the Spanish strengthened the Arawaks and they displaced some indigenous groups as they moved to where the Spanish settled. Keymis spoke to cacique Wareo, who told him that “he was latelie chased by the Spanish from Moruga...having burnt his own houses, and destroyed his fruits and gardens, he had left his countrey and townes to be possessed by the Arawaccas, who...do for the most part serve and follow the Spaniards.”\textsuperscript{50} Wareo also told Keymis that the same thing had happened to the Yao of Guiana,” 8 May 1602.


\textsuperscript{49} Lawrence Keymis, \textit{A Relation of the Second Voyage to Guiana, Perfourmed and Written in the Year 1596} (London, 1596). Something of the hopes Ralegh and Keymis had for native alliances is reflected in a poem contained in this work, which has the line “Riches with Honor, Conquest without Bloud [blood].”

\textsuperscript{50} Keymis, \textit{A Relation}, B3.
people of Trinidad, who had moved towards the Amazon and away from the Arawaks and Spanish. Because of the treatment different tribes had received from the Spanish and the Arawaks, they were ready to ally with the newly-arrived European outsiders, as Ralegh and others had discovered. Wareo agreed, and said the news of Ralegh’s visit “was now so generall, that the nations farre and neere were all agreed to joyne with us.” The presence of the Spanish especially hardened Carib identity, although it changed once again when the northern Europeans arrived, as different factions allied with various groups of colonists.\(^{51}\)

At the same time that these changes to northern European trade and indigenous society were happening, there were also important developments with respect to the newly created province of Trinidad y Guayana, the governorship of which had been awarded to Berrío and his heirs. In the second half of the 1590s, the Spanish crown attempted to strengthen the settlements. They were alarmed by Ralegh’s expedition, and the attention he drew to Spanish weakness. However, they were also convinced of the province’s worth when Domingo de Vera Ibarguen, Berrío’s campmaster, came to Spain with a store of plundered treasures: “fortie of most pure plates of golde curiously wrought, and swords of Guiana decked and inlaid with golde, feathers garnished with golde, and divers rarities.”\(^{52}\) Based upon these treasures, Philip II offered financial support for a new colonizing expedition. Around 1596, between one and two thousand new colonists were sent to the area.\(^{53}\) Some rebuilt San Josef de Oruña on Trinidad while

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\(^{53}\) Joyce Lorimer, “The English Contraband Tobacco Trade in Trinidad and Guiana, 1590-1617” in *The Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic, and America, 1480-1650*, ed. K. R.
others fortified San Tomé, on an island in the Orinoco. This push for settlement seems to indicate that the Spanish authorities were finally giving the area the attention it needed in order to ward off illegal trade and piracy. However, subsequent events demonstrated that they were still committed more to the idea of finding El Dorado than in sustainably developing the region. Once a new round of expeditions failed, the settlers left for more promising locations. A little more than a year later, there were 300 men in the province.\(^{54}\)

In 1597, Antonio de Berrío died and was succeeded by his son, Fernando. Fernando, unlike his father, lived almost his entire life in the New World. As a child, he had seen his father disappear into the interior and then waited as he emerged, sometimes years later, with nothing to show for it. He even accompanied his father for part of his last expedition. From 1597 to 1612, Fernando reportedly sent out eighteen expeditions in search of El Dorado, but the great number suggests they were much smaller affairs than those his father staged.

Fernando tried to shore up his fame and fortune another way, by attempting to develop a plantation economy in the two major settlements under his jurisdiction. After the colonists who had rushed in in 1596 died or left, each town would have forty or fewer settlers down to the 1640s. As part of the efforts to produce goods, settlers tried a few different things: sugar and ginger at San Josef, and cotton, indigo and cattle along the Orinoco. But tobacco was the most lucrative.

Because none of these goods were of interest to the Spanish crown, and since Trinidad y Guayana were never visited by official Spanish ships in any case, it is likely that their attempts to develop the economy were done with northern European traders in


\(^{54}\) Ibid...
mind. In fact, Fernando and his settlers were well aware that English, French, and Dutch traders wanted tobacco. Before the Spanish started growing it, English and French pirates regularly came to Trinidad and other Caribbean islands, where they procured tobacco from indigenous cultivators.

The account of a Dutch ship’s journey, recorded by its clerk, Abraham Cabeliau, provides a glimpse into the way that colonists, indigenous groups, and interlopers cooperated with and schemed against one another in the early years of Fernando’s governorship. In February 1598 the ship encountered a canoe of Indians—“of the Geribus and Jan nation” off the Venezuelan coast. The Indians asked them in Spanish if they were English. The Dutch, figuring it was close enough, answered, “Si, Si.” Once the Indians boarded the ship, Cabeliau and his men successfully communicated that they were actually “Holandees” rather than “Anglees.” For the next month, the ship traded with indigenous groups from the area as word of their presence spread to others, including the “Hebio and Arwaccus.” Next, the ship went to the Cayani River to rendezvous with an English ship. They traded with the Yao nation and procured Brazil wood, tobacco, various other goods, and two Indians who came, he said, of their own free will.55

In mid-April the English ship set sail, and the crew met up with two more Dutch ships. Together, they scouted the area, and Cabeliau noted all of the rivers. Using Indian guides, they made their way to San Tomé, where Fernando de Berrío lived, arriving in July. Cabeliau described the Spaniards’ situation for his Dutch audience. They “daily attempt to conquer” the nearby tribes, but neither force nor friendship had won them over. The Spanish were terrified of the Caribs, who shot poisoned arrows that when they

hit a man made “all his flesh…drop from his bones.” Around the time of Cabeliau’s visit, the Spanish on San Tomé were building a long road through the mountains to go around their Carib enemies to access the gold thought to be in the interior.

Fernando, more obliging than his father, gave the group a miner to take with them on the next leg—a search for gold mines. Despite Spanish help, or perhaps because of it, Cabeliau was already thinking of how they could be overtaken. He realized the Indians were key, since those “who bear enmity to the Spaniards, are friends with the Indians.” In fact, the natives told him they were waiting for English or Dutch assistance to get rid of the Spanish. But, for the time being, Cabeliau was not ready to antagonize anyone. He instead arranged with the Spanish to meet again to trade at Trinidad before setting off across the Atlantic, with American goods and people in tow.

Cabeliau’s account exposed to his audience, the States General, as well as to modern readers, the complicated political situation among settlers, indigenous groups, and traders in the area the Spanish called Trinidad y Guayana. Several facts of his story seem difficult to believe unless one understands the context in which they occurred. Native groups clamoring for the English, or the Spanish governor letting a Dutch ship take a miner on an expedition, are only comprehensible when placed in the history of the region. Cabeliau’s testimony helped the Dutch to see the potential for colonies in the area, and they likewise help us to understand how those colonies succeeded. They also show how accommodating Fernando was willing to be with those illicit traders positioned to make the colony viable.

The wedge of land between Spanish Venezuela and Portuguese Brazil was eventually colonized by the Dutch, English and French. Today it makes up the nations of Guiana, French Guiana, and Suriname.
Figure 20: 1599 Map of Guiana by Hondius created the same year as Cabeliau’s trip. This richly detailed map includes the location of Morequito’s village, the area where Arawaks lived, along with a note that they are friends of the Spanish, and information about Ralegh’s journey.

No documents directly attest to how Fernando and his colonists established and organized their tobacco plantations, but some idea of what they were like and how much they produced can be gleaned from the sources. Fernando had either the wisdom or the fortune to enter the tobacco trade at an opportune moment. Some tobacco plantations sprang up earlier, to the west in Venezuela and the province of New Andalucía (present-day Colombia). By 1605, smuggling there had grown so rampant that the cabildo of Caracas recommended its cultivation be stopped; in 1606 a royal order banned it for ten
years.\textsuperscript{57} The absence of tobacco there led traders further west, to areas under less oversight and control.

At the same time, tobacco was becoming wildly popular, and especially in England and the Netherlands. The English in particular favored Spanish tobacco, but it was expensive and difficult to obtain legally. In 1611, a Spanish observer estimated that the English smoked 100,000 pounds of tobacco a year, and acquired only 6,000 of those from Spain.\textsuperscript{58}

Nonetheless, by 1607 the plantations at San Josef and San Tomé were producing enough tobacco to merit the attention (and disapproval) of the governor of Cumaná, who warned Philip III that, “English and Dutch ships are never lacking there.”\textsuperscript{59} In February of 1611, the English trader Thomas Roe wrote that he had just been to “Port d’espagne in the Island of Trinidad where are 15 sayles of ships freighting Smoke: English, French, Dutch.” Roe highlighted Spain's inability to control the area. The Spanish colony, he warned, will “be turned all to Smoke” because the government there, “hath more skill in planting Tobacco and selling yt, then in erecting Colonyes, or marching of armyes.”\textsuperscript{60}

Over the next several years, reports from nearby settlements came to the crown, a few at first, then many, about Fernando de Berrío’s illegal trafficking. In 1608, the governor of Bogotá wrote to the King to complain that Fernando was neglecting the search for El Dorado and had not sent an update about it in ten years. His settlements had become, in the meantime, “the chosen resort of secular criminals, irregular priests, and

\textsuperscript{57} Lorimer, “English Contraband Tobacco Trade,” 128.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 136.
\textsuperscript{59} BL Add. MSS 36319, f.149, “Pedro Suarez Coronel to Philip III,” 18 Dec 1607.
\textsuperscript{60} National Archives, United Kingdom (hereafter NAUK) C.O. 1/1, no. 25, “Sir Thomas Roe to Salisbury,” Port d’Espaigne, Trinidad, Feb. 28, 1611.
apostate friars and in general a seminary of rascals.” Further, he writes, the “chief attraction is the trade with the pirate enemies.” As evidence of the extent of this trade, the governor offered up the fact that he had seen the goods and heard about Fernando’s activities himself.61

Many of the complaints came from Margarita. A 1609 letter to Philip III from Pedro Beltranilla illuminates the recent history of the area. Beltranilla originally came to Guiana after Ibarguen’s 1596 trip to Spain convinced Philip II to fund the settlement. On Vera’s word, Beltranilla wrote, “I left my country and the many comforts I had there.” But, “like many others” (perhaps implying Philip II), he had been deceived. Although he had come with 2,000 others just fourteen years before, only sixty or fewer settlers were alive. The others all “died miserably, except a few who escaped.” Beltranilla decided to make a go of it in this new land all the same, but moved to Margarita. From there, he watched as Trinidad y Guayana under Fernando de Berrío went from being an El Dorado death trap to something even more distasteful to him—disloyal. The two settlements were supporting themselves by trading with privateers and selling Indians on Margarita. Fernando himself acted without “any idea of Christianity” and respected “neither the law of God, nor the law of man,” and made no attempt to hide his dealings. Beltranilla wrote letters to Luis Fajardo and other nearby officials, but he feared none of them would be powerful enough to stop it. Instead, he recommended that the King send his own official, “with men and soldiers to protect his person.”62

61 Don Juan de Borja, Governor of Santa Fé, to the King of Spain, Santa Fé, June 20, 1608, in British Guiana Boundary Arbitration with the United State of Venezuela: Appendix to the Counter Case on Behalf of the Government of Her Brittanic Majesty (London, 1898), no. 2. The Santa Fé referred to here is actually Bogotá, the official name of which is Santa Fé de Bogotá.

62 Ibid., no. 3. “Licentiate Pedro Beltranilla to the King of Spain,” Margarita Island, November 30, 1609.
For a few years, Fernando, aware of the numerous complaints lodged against him, had compromised by occasionally attacking traders. In the fall of 1608, he persuaded twenty-seven sailors from two English ships (one owned by Ralegh) to come ashore to trade for tobacco. He then imprisoned them and demanded a ransom, but when it was paid, he hanged the men anyways. He hoped to hold onto both the trade with northern Europeans and his post.

By 1611, the trade was so flagrant that even northern Europeans were commenting on the impending fallout of Fernando’s activities. Tobacco trader and future Virginia Company investor Thomas Roe wrote from Trinidad in 1611 that, “the Justice of the kyng is dayly expected to come downe.” It finally did arrive in early 1612 in the form of Sancho de Alquiça, who was sent to the area to investigate de Berrío’s illegal trafficking and the presence of Dutch and English traders. Alquiça had served as governor of Caracas and had helped to end the illegal tobacco trade there, and he was selected for the task because of his familiarity with the situation. When he arrived in Trinidad y Guayana, however, the longtime colonial administrator was shocked. “The affairs of this country are so different from what they sound in your court,” he wrote to the King when he first arrived, “that they bear no comparison.”

Upon his arrival in San Josef, he found little investigation was needed. As he left his lodgings to prepare to hold an audience, “all the said residents” came out and “read me a Petition, confessing that for the past eight years they had traded with French,

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63 Lorimer, “English Contraband Tobacco Trade,” 140.
64 NAUK, C.O. 1/1, no. 25, “Sir Thomas Roe to the Earl of Salisbury”
65 Sancho de Alquiça to the King, San Josef de Oruña, Trinidad, February 11, 1612, in British Guiana Boundary, App. I, no. 10.
Flemings and English and other nations; and they fell on their knees asking pardon of your Majesty.” He took confessions from some, a few of whom made excuses, but found that the full confession meant it was “unnecessary for me to draw up a brief.” And it had been signed by everyone: “there were no others.” In one letter, Alquiça promised that the residents of Trinidad y Guayana would no longer trade tobacco without his permission, “for they have been severely threatened.” Yet, he found that Fernando de Berrío had been selling tobacco out of San Josef, even after Alquiça came to Trinidad—thirty-eight times, according to Alquiça’s report—and also was allowing others to do the same. Just like his people, when confronted, Fernando admitted what he had done: the circumstances required it. Alquiça, who had a long history of leniency, wrote to the King that he thought his crimes were so severe that he should be put to death.66

It seemed that everyone in Trinidad y Guayana grew tobacco and other goods to sell to non-Spanish traders, and that their illegal activities happened openly, with the support of local government. But this was not what Alquiça referred to when he wrote to the King about how different the country was from what he heard about it. Rather than the illegal traders per se, it was the constant local presence of enemies and the danger they always posed in the area. In some of the letters, Alquiça does not write about his official mission, but instead just about how difficult it is to live and travel in the area. Writing from Trinidad at the outset of his commission, he notes the immense difficulty of making it to San Tomé, sixty leagues away, on an island in the Orinoco River. Between Trinidad and the Orinoco, there were twenty-seven enemy ships. Even if Alquiça was willing to contend with that, there was no way to get there. “Boats are not to be found

66 Sancho de Alquiça to the King, Margarita Island, June 14, 1612, in ibid., App. I, no. 12.
when they are wanted in this town, and when they are found, Indian rowers are not to be got, on account of their having been so harried by the Caribs… they have retired inland.” Rowers might come if they could be sent for, but this, like most things for the settlers, “was a matter of considerable difficulty.” In order to send for rowers, it was necessary to dispatch at least twenty-four soldiers “for if less go it is like sending them to destruction.” He also had to outfit the soldiers himself, who were “so poor they have nothing under heaven if I do not supply them.” In any case, the town only had thirty-three residents, and they were needed to protect the island from the English and Dutch, who “go about in this port just as in the English Channel.” In the short time he had been there, Alquiça had already exchanged fire with the Dutch and English on the ships nearby, and as he closed the letter, he wrote that it was more important to “go with musket on shoulder than with pen in hand.”

In his letters to the King, Alquiça regularly mentions enemy ships. Going up and down the Orinoco, he encountered northern Europeans and Caribs alike: “great care was exercised to avoid any danger.” Alquiça was paid ten ducats a day but had spent 3,000 in just the first few months. He came to bring the justice of the King, but the letters of Sancho de Alquiça can also be read as a defense of the impoverished colonists’ turn to the illegal tobacco trade. Even with the support of the crown, Alquiça never had enough resources to carry out all of his tasks. Life for Spanish settlers in Trinidad y Guayana was impossible without the assistance of illegal trade and indigenous and African support. All the same, Alquiça’s arrival signaled the end of the heyday illegal tobacco trade.

67 Sancho de Alquiça to the King, in ibid., App. I, no. 10.
68 Sancho de Alquiça to the King, in ibid., no. 12.
Alquiça banned cultivation in 1612, and the lack of tobacco the following year probably persuaded some traders to move on all together, but it was also around this time that the Dutch, English, and French were founding temporary settlements and forts in South America, where they grew their own tobacco aided by Indians. They also were starting to make permanent settlements on Caribbean islands and in parts of North America. These endeavors were not a turn away from an earlier phase of privateering. Rather, they relied heavily upon the knowledge, experience, and familiarity with the region. Because of years spent in the Caribbean, and especially in Guiana, northern Europeans who hoped to gain a foothold in the Americas had a store of reliable knowledge.

Neglected Spanish colonists, then, made a concerted effort to provide tobacco to northern Europeans. The relationship, however, was much more complicated that just an exchange of goods and specie. Although the Dutch, French, and English were now getting their tobacco from the Spanish, their trips to Guiana often involved exploration as well. When Antonio de Berrío founded San Tomé on the Orinoco, many miles from the shore, he did it because he thought it would prove a better base for finding El Dorado. Later, when his son Fernando turned the settlement into a tobacco plantation, it had the unintended consequence of familiarizing the interlopers with the river. As Cabeliau and others made the journey, they noted where the river branched off, how deep it was, and where it went. And, as Cabeliau did, many continued on past the settlement. Nor was it just the Orinoco. Those who journeyed to Guiana for tobacco sometimes went west of Trinidad, along the coast, and surveyed that. The Spanish were aware of these trips, and
they even acknowledged the superior geographical knowledge of their sometime rivals, especially the Dutch.

Thomas Roe, who traded tobacco on Trinidad in 1611, spent over a year in the area. He went along the Amazon “with his Shippe 200. miles, and then with Boates 100. more, and made divers journeys into the maine among the Indians.” He found the land “well inhabited and full of good commodities.”69 He explored the Orinoco, too, and claimed he had “seene more of this coast rivers and inland from the Great River of the Amazones under the line to Orenoque in 8 degrees than any Englishman now alive.”70

Philip Purcell, an Irish captain who established a tobacco plantation on the Amazon, also got his start “carrying goods to trade in Trinidad and the river Orenoco for tobacco,” where he “trafficked with the Governor Berrio.” At the end of one trip, “having been in Trinidad for two months and having found out about the river of the Amazons,” he “returned to England and… chartered a Dutch ship and went to that place.” For Purcell, geographical education happened both while on a ship, exploring, but also on land, from talking with others who lived or traveled in the area.

The Spanish managed to keep a tenuous hold on the parts of Guiana that would become Venezuela. Ultimately, though, the northern Europeans, and especially the Dutch, were able to prey upon Spanish weakness in the area to maintain a permanent presence there. Further to the east, in the territory known today as the Guianas, Dutch, French, and English traders established a series of short-lived posts. After the Dutch West India Company was organized in 1621, the company moved to make more permanent


70 NAUK C.O. 1/1, no. 25, “Sir Thomas Roe to Salisbury.”
settlement there. For the next two hundred years, the English, French, and Dutch, would fight over this wedge of land, nestled between Venezuela and Brazil, but together, they made Iberian control of it impossible. And, even though it was claimed and settled by the Spanish, both the English and the Dutch continued to hold Trinidad and Tobago in the highest regard. Eventually, the islands were wrested away from the Spanish in the eighteenth century.
On the last day of April in 1620, a ship set sail from Plymouth, England, headed to the New World. On board, it carried over 120 people, most of whom were going to be left in the Americas to establish “trade and plantation.” The trip across the Atlantic took seven weeks and resulted in only one death, a favorable outcome by the standards of the day. When John Smith wrote an account of the settlement a few years later, he declared that when they arrived, “the sight of the Countrey and people so contented them, that never men thought themselves more happie.” They found the place “most healthfull, pleasant and fruitfull.” The captain “having made a good voyage… returned to England,” leaving the settlers to make a home among the Indians, who were living in “many Townes well inhabited… unfrequented till then by any Christian.” In just a few years, some English living in the area had been entirely won over by both “the goodnes of that Country,” and by the “gentle disposition of the people,” and vowed to stay. Despite the settlers’ warm feelings about their new home, their enterprise would soon run into trouble. Rather than going to North America, these colonists had made their home thousands of miles to the south, along the Amazon.\(^1\)

In the first three decades of the seventeenth century, the northern coast of South America, from Venezuela to Brazil, was home to a number of small, short-lived colonies

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of northern Europeans. While we usually associate northern European colonies with North America, or perhaps the Caribbean, colonization efforts in this period were just as likely to be further south. These small settlements existed on the margins of empires and they did not give rise to modern nation-states. As a result, they have been ignored in most colonial histories.\(^2\) In their own time, too, they were obscure, and this isolation led to their modest success.

Rather than dismissing them as colonial failures, this chapter considers them to be an important period in the transition from piracy, illicit trading, and similar activities to the establishment of empires in the Americas. In these settlements, northern Europeans learned important lessons about American geography, agriculture, and indigenous politics. Their persistence in these settlements led to their success elsewhere. In his 1986 classic *The Shaping of America*, D.W. Meinig laid out the three skills necessary for a successful colonial power: seafaring, conquering, and planting, and suggested that only Spain possessed all three.\(^3\) This chapter argues, in part, that South America provided the laboratory that led England and the Netherlands to acquire the second and third.

The precursor to the South American settlements was the illicit tobacco trade that operated out of the Spanish colony of Trinidad y Guayana. There, Spanish settlers who lived on the margins of empire, largely unsupported by the metropole, started growing tobacco to sell to English, Dutch, and French traders who frequented the area. The trade

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thrived from the late 1590s to the mid-1610s. By 1600, there were two Spanish settlements in Trinidad y Guyana. One was on Trinidad itself; the other was two hundred miles up the Orinoco River, in present-day Venezuela. From 1570 to 1600, far to the southeast, the Portuguese waged a war against the Potiguar peoples, and came to control the land from Bahia to São Roque, in Rio Grande do Norte, on Brazil’s easternmost point. In between the extremes of Spanish and Portuguese settlement lay 1,200 miles of coast.

It was along this stretch of land and into the interior that small groups of northern Europeans came to settle from around 1600 to the 1630s. These settlements varied dramatically; some of them collapsed almost immediately, while others continued for
years, and a few became permanent colonies. Several colonies were situated close to the Spanish, whether to antagonize, trade with them, or do both; others were a safer distance away. They all had a few things in common, though. First, each of the colonies existed only through strong alliances with indigenous groups. Second, they were often founded or financed by men with experience in the area, whether through piracy or more peaceful trade. Third, all of the colonies were home to tobacco plantations.

Most of the illicit settlements in the time and place discussed here were founded by groups of English or Dutch or both English and Dutch. The area was also home to at least one plantation of Irish. The settlers themselves were probably more diverse, but very little is known about most of them. Settlements founded until about 1615 were small, with no more than fifty men. Afterwards, a few larger settlements were founded that contained up 280 settlers. The French had a continued presence in Brazil from the mid-sixteenth century in a series of settlements, but they followed a different trajectory. Some of them, like the settlements founded in the 1550s under the leadership of Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon, were intended to provide Huegenots a religious refuge. French Huegenots were often present in Dutch and French colonies, too, complicating the notion that these settlements had a straightforward national identity.

Although some settlements may have existed earlier, plans for settlements increased dramatically around 1610, as it became more difficult for the upstart empires to

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trade in tobacco with the Spanish settlements near Trinidad and as their own local knowledge increased. By the early years of the seventeenth century, there were northern Europeans with a lot of experience in the Americas, and especially in Guiana. Northern Europeans were knowledgeable about the geography of this region. They knew where they could settle with the least risk and chose locations that were removed from Spanish and Portuguese settlements. They were also increasingly well-informed about the people, and they took care to cement alliances with groups they thought could help them.

Anti-Spanish sentiment often fueled colonization schemes in northern Europe, but colonists themselves did not often have a directly antagonistic relationship with the Spanish. In her work on Providence Island, a short-lived settlement off the coast of Nicaragua founded by Puritans in 1631, Karen Kupperman argued that English colonists filled with anti-Spanish furor purposely chosen to settle close to Spanish colonists in order to harass them. The settlements in South America, however, were founded in a different religious climate and tended to have a far more complex relationship with the Spanish settlements. The settlers were predominately Protestant and even included some French Huguenots who sought to escape religious persecution. However, the settlements were not founded with strong religious convictions and those who had experience in the area had a record of cooperation with the Spanish, not just conflict. To be sure, colonial pursuits were often a way for English and Dutch to promote an anti-Spanish agenda, but

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6 I use the geographical term “Guiana” as it was used in the seventeenth century: very loosely. Guiana referred roughly to the part of South America that we might call “the Guianas” today (Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana), but sometimes included the Spanish settlements of eastern Venezuela as well as parts of northern Brazil. The very allure of Guiana was in some part due to it being imperfectly known to Europeans.

the reality was often more complicated and colonists regularly worked with Spaniards, even as they were trying to thwart them.

There were other, more practical matters that made South America an attractive site for colonial projects. An obvious reason that the Dutch and English preferred these places was the warm climate. The Dutch colonial promoter Willem Usselincx argued in his 1608 work, the *Vertoogh*, (or “Remonstrance”), that warmer climates were preferable. If readers think the Spanish have claimed all the best places in the Americas, he writes, they are wrong. Specifically, Usselincx suggests Florida, the Antilles, the coast of Guiana, parts of Brazil, and from the south of Brazil to the Strait of Magellan—all places the Spanish failed to colonize. The benefit of this to Usselincx is partly in the sort of goods one might obtain there: luxury commodities that grow in warm climates. Moreover, the Dutch are in a better position to capitalize on them. The Spanish, he writes, do not allow vines or olives to be grown there because they already grow these things in Spain. The Dutch would have no such conflict and, another writer adds, they could soon supply not just themselves but all of Europe.

A second reason for settling near the Spanish was that those were the places the Dutch and English knew best. When foreign traders came for tobacco, many of them also took the opportunity to learn more about the area. It was common for ships coming from Europe to first head south along the coast of Africa, cross the Atlantic where winds were most favorable, and then sail west along this part of South America before arriving at Trinidad. Many ships took the opportunity to trade with indigenous groups along the way, and to chart the rivers they found.

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8 Willem Usselincx, *Vertoogh, hoe nootwendich, nut ende profijtelick....* (1608).
9 *More Excellent Observations of the Estate and Affairs of Holland* (1622), 1.
In 1598, the Dutch captain Abraham Cabeliau described just such a trip and claimed his crew had “Discovered, found, and navigated… more than twenty four rivers, many islands in the rivers, and other divers harbors” along the coast east of Trinidad. In 1611, Thomas Roe sailed northwest along the South American coast before arriving at Trinidad to trade tobacco. Writing to the Earl of Salisbury, he claimed to “have seene more of this coast rivers and inland from the Great River of the Amazones under the line [the equator] to Orenoque in 8 degrees, then any Englishman now alive.” Dutch and English attention to the area was recorded graphically, in maps that explorers to the region made in order to learn more about the area. For colonial adventurers who had gotten their start in the illicit trade off the coast of Venezuela, it made sense to establish colonies as close as possible to the areas in which they had experience, instead of setting out in search of unexplored places with different climates, soil conditions, and natural products.

The third, and perhaps most crucial, reason for settling in the area was one that the settlers themselves readily used, even as they lacked the ability to fully articulate it. In the coastal areas on the outskirts of Spanish and to some extent, Portuguese settlement, English, Dutch, French, and any other non-Iberian were offered the chance to ally themselves with indigenous groups who had been adversely affected by the existing colonial regimes. Scholarship on the Black Legend has considered how Protestant northern Europeans deployed an image of Spanish tyranny abroad to protest Spanish power in Europe. The Black Legend was rooted in an anti-Catholic worldview, and it

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sometimes worked to obscure the atrocities committed by all Atlantic empires.\textsuperscript{12} Even if accounts of Spanish actions in the Americas served a particular political purpose, it is nevertheless true that in their early forays to the Americas, the Dutch and English were indeed greeted by indigenous peoples who sought alliances with them against the Spanish or Portuguese. All of the settlements in Guiana existed in cooperation with indigenous groups. The relationship between indigenous and European populations was fundamentally different here than in most sites of colonization.

Historians have written about these places where different empires encountered one another as spaces beyond the control, perhaps even the concern, of European nations.\textsuperscript{13} The phrase “no peace beyond the line,” has been deployed to describe how conflict between imperial powers in the Caribbean and the South American coasts had little to no repercussion in Europe. In fact, the northern European settlements in South America operated in a context that was at once incredibly local and very international. These settlements were in a faraway and remote area of the Americas, but they were tightly connected to an evolving political situation in Europe.

The Dutch had been at war with Spain since 1568, when they revolted from Spanish rule. During this period, the Netherlands had sought to increase their trade


abroad and in 1602 established the Dutch East India Company. A campaign for a Dutch West India Company was waged a few years later, just as some in the United Provinces contemplated a truce with Spain. Protestants from Flanders, whose homeland was still under Spanish control, tended to be against peace. For them, the United Provinces still had work to do. The peace party, however, won out, and in 1609, signed the Twelve Year Truce. In exchange for recognition from Spain, the Netherlands would abstain from trade in the West Indies. This put a hold on a West India Company, but Dutch sailors, merchants, and colonists traveled to the Americas all the same, and especially to the Wild Coast (the Dutch name for Guiana) and Brazil. England, too, had taken a belligerent stand against Spain in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, fighting the Anglo-Spanish War. The accession of James I to the throne in 1603, however, led to a change in policy, culminating in the end of the War with the signing of the Treaty of London in 1604. This meant that around the time the settlements in South America were taking hold, both English and Dutch leaders were disinclined to officially endorse them.

Overseas plans also regularly occurred in an environment of close Anglo-Dutch co-operation. In 1585, the English were given control of two Dutch port towns as security for a debt. One of these “cautionary towns,” Flushing (Vlissingen), became the site of enthusiasm for overseas projects. A burgomaster of the town, Jan de Moor, was an investor in several of the Guiana settlements. Indeed, while Amsterdam and Holland tended to support ventures in the East Indies, most of the capital for West Indies expeditions came from two cities in Zeeland: Middleburg and Flushing. Joyce Lorimer has suggested that for the English, operating out of Flushing made perfect sense. The

Dutch had experience and capital, and since they were still technically subjects of the Spanish, could on occasion provide a convincing front since the Spanish continued to rely upon Dutch and Flemish merchants.¹⁵ When the cautionary towns were finally redeemed and returned to the Dutch in 1616, many of the English had been living there for years, working in the garrisons. Now unemployed, some decided that, instead of going back to their homeland, they would prefer to head for the Amazon. The 130-plus settlers who set out from Flushing in 1616 under Pieter Adriaenszoon Ita were a mix of Dutch and English

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¹⁵ *English and Irish Settlement*, 51. Spain also continued to hold Flanders and employed many Flemings in their overseas ventures.
The Settlements

The initial settlements were founded in the first years of the seventeenth century. The first English settlement in South America was established on the Wiapoco River in May of 1604, under the leadership of Charles Leigh.\textsuperscript{16} Like most of those who settled in South America in this period, Leigh had been to the area at least once before.\textsuperscript{17} Leigh quickly made arrangements with the Yaos. They offered him food and shelter in exchange for assistance fighting Caribs. They had, however, unwittingly settled in an unhealthy location. Many of the men became ill, which seems to have tested both the

\textsuperscript{16} For more on Leigh, see John Nicholl, \textit{An Houre glasse of Indian newes} (London, 1607); \textit{English and Irish Settlement}, 26.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{English and Irish Settlement}, 26.
willingness of the Yaos to accommodate the English, and the colonists’ desire to remain. Leigh’s original intention was to find mines, but he soon recognized the potential of ready commodities. The Dutch were already coming to trade flax. Leigh wrote to his brother to report that he thought he could “returne a Shipp laden with Flaxe and other commodities the next year.” Leigh requested that his brother send weavers to work the flax. He also asked for gardeners, whom he thought would be among the most helpful laborers for the near future. Despite his plans to grow the colony, Leigh’s project was short-lived. He died on a return voyage, and the men who had remained returned in 1606, before a group sent to support them arrived.

Its short tenure notwithstanding, Leigh’s colony drew attention to the advantages of the Wiapoco River. In 1609, Robert Harcourt established a settlement near where Leigh’s had been, though he soon moved it as a native leader warned him of its poor location. A Yao chief known as Leonard Ragapo was an associate of Walter Ralegh who had been to England. Ragapo told Harcourt that the location, “was very unhealthful; that our men would there bee subject to sickness, and die.” Like Leigh, Harcourt initially came in search of mines, but he soon turned to commodities. Harcourt returned to England with news of his success. In 1613, he published an account, *Relation of a Voyage to Guiana*, and in August was awarded a patent for exclusive commercial and administrative rights in the region from the Amazon to the Essequibo Rivers.

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18 Purchas His Pilgrimes (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1905-07), XVI, ch. 12, 320-21.
19 Ibid., 322.
21 Ibid., 81
Even as Harcourt gained such control, several settlements existed in the area outside Company interference. In 1612, two men with connections with Virginia, expedition leader Matthew Morton, and financer Thomas Roe, established a settlement on the Amazon. A group from Ireland also settled along the Amazon at around the same time. In 1613, the Spanish even complained of an English settlement near Margarita Island. Nor were the English alone. There were several Dutch settlements by this time along the Amazon and its tributaries, as well as a few settlements and trading posts further north. From the mid-sixteenth century, the French made a series of attempts to settle parts of Brazil. Harcourt’s own colony consisted of a few settlements dispersed around the Wiapoco. It collapsed after his brother Michael, whom he had left in charge, returned to England in 1612 and died.\textsuperscript{22}

The Dutch first sent factors rather than colonists to live in Guiana. One or two men would live along the coast to procure (rather than produce) desirable commodities, like tobacco, cotton, dyewood, and other tropical products, through barter. Dutch ships would periodically visit the factor to take the commodities back to the Netherlands and provide him with a new shipment of trade goods, like axes, knives, and beads. These Dutch ships also typically supplied the English settlements and bought their produce.\textsuperscript{23}

The historiography of the Dutch Empire rightly places primacy on their role as traders, rather than as colonizers. Although the Dutch held colonies around the world, their footprint was never the size of the other major Atlantic powers. Instead, they amassed great riches in the seventeenth century by buying, selling, and trading

\textsuperscript{22} Robert Harcourt, \textit{A Voyage to Guiana} ed. C.A. Harris, Works Issued for the Hakluyt Society no. 60 (London, 1927), 8. There is scant information about Harcourt’s efforts to resupply his colony, so we do not know more about the precise reasons for its demise.

\textsuperscript{23} For more on the factor system see Goslinga, \textit{Dutch in the Caribbean}, 58.
commodities globally. Yet in the early seventeenth century, the form the Dutch Empire might take was still uncertain. The factor system used by the Dutch was modeled after those of the French and Portuguese in West Africa and Brazil. Soon, some Dutch colonial enthusiasts realized that factors alone would not suffice if the Dutch hoped to be major players in the Americas.

In 1603 a petitioner appeared before the States General to argue for colonization. The immediate issue at hand was a mine, recently discovered in Guiana. To exploit the mine, or even to determine if it was worth mining at all, the area would need to be populated by Dutchmen and have “strong cities and fortresses.” Trading posts might work well in Asia, but in America “no riches or profits are to be drawn or gained either from the mines or from the fertility of the country unless the said land be first populated.” Willem Usselincx also endorsed colonies over mere trade as part of his plan to make the Americas a market for Dutch manufactures. If the Dutch live alongside the Indians, in time they will become more civil and “will by degrees begin to wear clothes.” In his surprisingly forward-thinking pamphlet, he argues Dutch colonization can transform Indians into consumers and thus laborers. African slavery, by contrast, would only create laborers who, “wear nothing and use nothing.” Dutch plans for the Americas were created with reference to the Spanish and indigenous peoples there, and the Dutch intended to work with both to advance their imperial ambitions.

24 Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms*, 103.
27 *More Excellent Observations of the Estate and Affaires of Holland* (1622), 20; see also Usselincx, *Onpartydich Discours*
Indigenous Alliance

Even before the Dutch and English settled in the Americas, they began to form close alliances with indigenous groups. The first connections were a matter of material exchange. By the late sixteenth century, tribes in the Caribbean and coastal South America were readily trading with Europeans. Some of the Caribbean tribes were independent and fiercely protected their right to stay that way. An attempted English settlement on St. Lucia in 1605, for example, was promptly evicted by the native Caribs, who forced the English onto canoes and into the sea, where most died before finally finding land and the begrudging assistance of Spanish colonists.28

On the mainland it was a different story. As recounted in Chapter Three, in the early sixteenth century, when the Spanish began to colonize parts of Venezuela, they allied with the Arawaks, as they had elsewhere.29 The English and especially the Dutch quickly allied with the Caribs. The European connections that these two groups made had disastrous consequences for other tribes. Because the Arawak and Caribs moved close to their European allies, tribes who had formerly lived in those areas were displaced. In 1604, when Charles Leigh sought to establish the aforementioned colony near the Wiapoco River, he found the area populated by 1500 people, from the Yaos, Sapais, and Arawaks, who, “beeing chased from other Rivers, by the Caribes have combined themselves together at this place for their better defense, and are now at deadly warres

28 Nicholl, Hour Glasse.

29 Although terms like “Arawak” and “Carib” are useful categories of belonging, they oversimplify at times. Although the Arawaks were allies with the Spanish broadly, some groups of Arawaks were also greatly disadvantaged. Much as the Europeans in the area clustered in small settlements, sometimes fought with those who spoke the same language as them, and made alliances with supposed enemies, so too did the indigenous groups in the area.
with the Caribes.” Harcourt’s 1609 account described roughly the same area: “These Provinces are peopled with divers Nations of severall languages, namely, \textit{Yaios, Arwaccas, Sappaios, Paragotos, and Charibes}. The \textit{Charibes} are the ancient inhabitant, and the other Nations are such as have been chased away from \textit{Trinidado}, and the borders of the \textit{Orenoque}.” The geopolitical situation presented an opportunity for the northern European interlopers. The Yaos and Sopaios asked Leigh to stay, “with condition that he should ayde and defend them against their enemies the Caribes and others.” The Englishmen promptly went with them to burn Carib houses.

Another factor facilitated European settlement. When the colonists first arrived, they often needed food. In northern colonial spaces, like Virginia, needy newcomers were a drain on resources. In Guiana, a climate that was warm year round and had two growing seasons, it was easier for indigenous groups to accommodate hungry colonists. When an anonymous Dutch author described Guiana as a place where, when one leaf falls, another springs forth to take its place, he was exaggerating to attract colonists. Yet, it was less hyperbolic than it might seem. Provisions in exchange for military assistance seemed a fair deal to both groups.


31 Harcourt, \textit{Voyage to Guiana}, 86.


34 \textit{Pertinente Beschrijvinge van Guiana Gelegen aen de vaste Kust van America} (Amsterdam, 1676).

The alliances were further strengthened by the practice of exchanging people—leaving settlers behind and taking Indians back to Europe. Reading the various accounts of these journeys, one is struck by the number of times colonists show up in unfamiliar places only to casually encounter someone who speaks their language. When Robert Harcourt and his men coasted in the Bay of Wiapoco in 1609, they were greeted by canoes of Indians who asked them where they were from. Then, “understanding that wee were English men boldly came aboard us one of them could speake out language well, and was knowne to some of my company to bee an Indian, that sometime had been in England.” As he was preparing his colony, Harcourt dispersed his own men around the country. He left five in the province of the Carib chief Arrawicary, in order to “hold amity and friendshipe with the Charibes, to learne their language, and to keepe peace betweene them and the Yaios, Arwaccas, and other nations” A 1598 Dutch voyage brought back two Yaos, who allegedly volunteered.

The Dutch often strengthened their alliances through marriage. A Spanish complaint mentions that there are “fifty married Dutch” established in the Courentyne River. Intermarriage was probably a strategy from the beginning. One of the very first records of a Dutch person being sent to live on the Wild Coast is actually two records. The first contract was annulled and replaced by the second one. In the first version of the contract, made between Willem Albertz and the Guiana and Wiapoco Company, Albertz

1948), 523.

36 Harcourt, *Voyage to Guiana*, 71.


39 “An Account of the state of affairs on the island of Trinidad,” in *ibid.*, no. 14, p. 35.
was permitted to bring his wife to live with him. The second contract is identical, except that it explicitly is noted that there are no conditions regarding wives. Sometime after drafting the contract, the company must have decided it would be better for Albertz to go as a single man. Maybe they thought Guiana was no place for a Dutch woman, but perhaps they thought Albertz would better serve the company if he could make a marital alliance with an indigenous woman and her family.\textsuperscript{40} By 1637, the Dutch who married “the Indian Carib women, as well as those of other tribes” had become “so mixed with the Indians” that the Spanish found it difficult to break their alliance.\textsuperscript{41}

\textit{Tobacco Cultivation}

Although the settlers in Guiana and Brazil varied somewhat, procuring tropical commodities was the chief economic aim of all. Initially these goods were obtained through barter with indigenous allies, but in every settlement that endured for more than a few weeks, the colonists turned to agriculture, and chiefly tobacco. Tobacco was a logical choice for the colonists because at the time it was in high demand and short supply.

The northern Europeans learned about tobacco cultivation and production from the Spanish living on Trinidad and along the Orinoco. The Spanish there had made certain innovations to the process, like curing, and had developed the type of tobacco most in demand in Europe. Robert Harcourt held out great hopes for tobacco, which “is planted, gathered, seasoned, and made up fit for the Merchant in short time, and with easie labour.” He added that, “when we first arrived in those parts, wee altogether wanted

\textsuperscript{40} Stadsarchief Amsterdam, (hereafter S.A.A.) 5075 102/4 18 juni 1605; 102/13-13v, 22 juni 1605.

\textsuperscript{41} Letter to his Majesty from the Corporation of Trinidad, 27\textsuperscript{th} of December, 1637, in \textit{British Guiana Boundary}, App. I, no. 41, p. 88.
the true skill and knowledge how to order it, which now of late wee happily have learned of the Spaniards themselves.”

A Spanish account of a Dutch-Carib fort destroyed in 1614 recorded that “they had sown a great quantity of tobacco, which seems to have been their principal object.” The Spanish captured some of the Dutch, who told them ships were expected to come soon for the tobacco and that what they had grown themselves was to have been augmented by what their Carib allies could procure from the interior. A 1613 report alleged the English had settled on the mainland near Margarita Island, a Spanish settlement just west of Trinidad, “with the favour of the Caribs, with the intention of cultivating tobacco.” At The Hague in 1615, Pieter Lodewycx reported that he and his son had built two houses and were cultivating tobacco along the Wiapoco. A 1617 letter to Thomas Roe informing him of some colonists of his recently returned to England said they came back “ryche” because they “brought with them so muche Tobacco.”

In these colonies, where English, Dutch, and others participated in indigenous wars, the thing they got in return was labor to grow tobacco. The nature of this labor, whether free or enslaved, is not always clear. Harcourt described an Indian, Anthony Canabre, as his tenant. Other accounts describe the exchange of agricultural labor for military alliance. A Spanish complaint from 1613, however, said the “Flemish and Caribs

42 Harcourt, *Voyage to Guiana*, 105.
47 Harcourt, *Voyage to Guiana*, 114.
steal the friendly Indians and carry them to their settlements to employ them in cultivating tobacco.”

Charles Leigh was “promised Indians to help mee to build and to plant,” but whether indigenous leaders were giving him enslaved laborers or not is never stated.

The wholehearted turn to tobacco represented an ideological shift in European colonization in the Americas. Because the Spanish found great mineral wealth in the Americas, other nations hoped to emulate them. One need only consider the Guiana forays of Walter Ralegh, who dreamed (as many Spanish did) of finding El Dorado. Uncertainly and haphazardly, northern European colonists turned their attention away from the pursuit of mineral wealth and towards the production of plantation crops. Harcourt, who went on a hunt for mines and then admonished himself for it, wrote that, “onely this commodity Tobacco… will bring as great a benefit and profit to the undertakers, as ever the Spaniards gained by the best and richest Silver myne in all their Indies.”

Because these settlements were typically quite small, they offered a contrast to what the Portuguese and especially the Spanish were doing in the Americas. Even though these two empires were not necessarily physically present in some of these places, indigenous groups felt their intrusion through displacement and heard about the conquests they had made elsewhere. Both Europeans and Americans were steadily becoming integrated into one’s another rivalries and politics.

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50 Harcourt, *Voyage to Guiana*, 105.
For northern Europeans who relied upon Indian labor, provisions, knowledge, and military assistance, the situation was precarious. They had to choose their friends wisely. Harcourt sent four of five of his men to Cayenne, to attempt a settlement. The area was under the leadership of the Carib Arrawicary, who the English found to be “trusty and faithfull to our Nation,” but “to our friend Leonard of Cooshebery, hee is a mortall enemie.” According to the chronicler John Scott, the Anglo-Dutch settlement founded by Pieter Adriaenszoon Ita got too involved in local fights: “the Losse of that Hopeful Colony was, thier Engageing themselves in the Quarels of the Indians.” The colonists had made friends with the Supanes, who were enemies of the “percotes” who were, unfortunately, friends with the Portuguese. The settlement was thus destroyed in 1623. The reason behind this defeat, however, had as much to do with European politics as with indigenous.

The Establishment of Companies

The Portuguese grew increasingly alarmed by the interlopers in the area after the establishment of Ita’s Anglo-Dutch colony in 1616. It was of particular concern as it contained “many people, women among them, making a fort.” While many of the settlements heretofore had seemed of a temporary nature, the presence of women and children demonstrated an intention to stay. Still, when the colony was founded, the Portuguese were at a disadvantage. It is clear from their letters that they did not know

51 Ibid., 86.
52 English and Irish Settlement, 164.
53 Andres Pereira, “Account of what there is in the great and famous river of the Amazons, newly discovered” (1616), English and Irish Settlement, 172.
precisely where the settlements were; their information came from indigenous allies and from some Frenchmen whose fort they had captured. A Portuguese captain reporting on the affairs of Grão Pará in 1618 or 1619 described the necessity of learning how to navigate the river “Corupa” (present-day Canal do Gurupá), which was a place with “a great many Indians and, so they say, white men, but no Portuguese up to now.”

Part of the reason, then, for the Portuguese weakness was their comparative lack of geographic knowledge. The captain explained further that, “the reason why the Indians of that district do not wish to come to trade with us at our fort, because as well as the bad things which they [the English and the Dutch] tell them about us (and it may be with good cause), they give them what they want more freely and treat them better and with greater honesty, which is what they desire.”

Thus, while the Portuguese were both growing in number and increasingly alarmed about the intrusions, they did not yet present enough of a challenge to the northern European settlements. In fact, even as the Portuguese wrote about the need to oust them, small-scale successes in South America combined with a series of developments in Europe to encourage both English and Dutch to pursue more ambitious projects in the area.

Antagonism between James and some of his subjects complicated colonial ventures. Far from being enthusiastic about their pacific prince, certain members of Parliament thought him too friendly with Spain. A particular cause of strife was James’ wish to arrange a marriage between Henry, the Prince of Wales, and the Spanish Infanta, Anne of Austria. After her betrothal to Louis XIII of France and Henry’s death in 1612,

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55 English and Irish Settlement, 175.
negotiations stalled. They shortly resumed, however, this time between the new Prince of Wales, Charles, and the Infanta Maria Anna. James’ hope for a Spanish and Catholic Queen of England demonstrated to some detractors both his ambivalence about Protestantism and his disdain for counsel.  

The Spanish ambassador to England, Diego Sarmiento de Acuña, Count Gondomar, was a major intermediary between Spain and James I. Gondomar was ambassador from 1613-1618 and again from 1620-1622. He seemed to hold great sway over James I, partly because of his influence in negotiating a marriage alliance, but also because James genuinely enjoyed his company. The power that Gondomar, and by extension Spain, seemed to exert over the King exacerbated fears that James was too sympathetic to Catholics and vexed some English nobility. Thomas Middleton’s 1625 play *A Game at Chaess* cast Gondomar as the villain, an indicative of the ambassador’s notoriety. These political and religious dynamics encouraged some English nobles to coalesce around projects like the Amazon Company.

Gondomar’s ambassadorial skill partly explains the divergent results he and a predecessor achieved in arguing for similar things. In 1607, as a group of Englishmen prepared to set sail to Virginia the Spanish ambassador at the time, Don Pedro de Zúñiga, was unconcerned. Virginia, he wrote to the Philip III, had little to offer. But soon, Zúñiga had changed his mind. The English returning from Jamestown thought the area

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promising, and the Virginia Company prepared to send out more settlers and supplies. Zúñiga quickly sought a meeting with James, who rebuffed his entreaties for months. When he met with the King in September of 1607 and complained that the Jamestown settlement violated the Treaty of London, the king replied that his hands were tied. A decade later, Gondomar had more success at arguing his case.

By the late 1610s, two dramatic incidents demonstrated the limits of James’ commitment to South American colonization. In 1617, Walter Ralegh, imprisoned in the Tower since 1603, petitioned the King for release so that he might travel to “Guiana,” by which he meant the Spanish settlements on Trinidad and along the Orinoco. Nearby, Ralegh promised, he knew of a gold mine that would replenish James’ treasury. Ralegh swore that there were no Spanish near the mine, and was allowed to leave after promising not to attack any Spanish settlements. This permission was granted while the able Gondomar was away. Later, James would declare he had never believed the story. He let Ralegh go because so many others did believe it.

Ralegh left in March of 1616, but only arrived at the mouth of the Cayenne River in November, after a long and troubled voyage. Five ships under Lawrence Keymis sailed up the Orinoco in December and arrived at San Tomé January 18. They attacked the city and both the Spanish governor and Ralegh’s own son died. Ralegh’s nephew, George Ralegh, led the search for the mine, but after traveling three hundred miles upstream with no sign of it, he gave up. The group burned San Tomé and returned to report the news to Ralegh, still at the mouth of the river. Keymis stabbed himself in the heart after his

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apology was refused. A contingent of Ralegh’s men deserted him, and arrived in England before him. Roger North, a captain, related the story of the fiasco. In his statement, North confessed that he thought Ralegh had invented the mine, and anticipated conflict with the Spanish.\textsuperscript{60} Ralegh was executed shortly after his return to England.

Roger North still thought that Guiana could be profitable if he avoided Ralegh’s mistakes. Soon after his return, he began planning a new colonial venture for an Amazon Company. Perhaps taking a cue from Harcourt, his sometime rival and collaborator, North’s prospectus for the Company prioritized its flora. Guiana was “aboundinge with many rich Commodities, as riche dyes, medicinable drugges, sweete gummings, Cotton Woole, sugar Caines, Choice Tobacco, precious Woods, Nutmegg trees, and other spices, usefull plantes, and pleazant fruites, which the soile naturally bringeth forth.”\textsuperscript{61} Perhaps mindful of Virginia’s high mortality rate, he also claimed Guiana was fit “for healthfull habitacion.”

North had seen that James only backed such enterprises if they did not encroach upon Spanish settlement, or if the reward offset any risk. Potential riches from tobacco, dyes, and sugar might not suffice to convince James. Thus, he added that the region was “likewise yelding apparent probabilities of rich Mines, and Minneralls of sundry sorts.” Instead of settling on the area near Spanish Trinidad y Guayana, he proposed colonizing the farthest edge of Guiana—the Amazon River. The claim that this area was “not

\textsuperscript{60} “The Examination of Captain Roger North, taken before the Lords at Whitehall, 17 Sept. 1618,” in Harlow, \textit{Last Voyage}, 257-9.

\textsuperscript{61} “The preamble for subscription to the Amazon Company” (6\textsuperscript{th}/16\textsuperscript{th} April 1619), in \textit{English and Irish Settlement}, 192.
inhabited by anie Christian Prince” was much more plausible. The Amazon Company was duly chartered in 1619.

This action demonstrates that James was not willing to cede South America to the Spanish. Scholarship typically attributes the lack of viability of South American colonies to their proximity to the Spanish and Portuguese. Joyce Lorimer argued that it was not attacks by the Spanish and Portuguese but rather investors’ wariness due to James’s lack of support that caused such venture to fail. But in 1617-9 at least, James willingly lent his backing. Perhaps because Gondomar was away as the Amazon Company started to form, James was more willing to take risks. Financial pressures also weighed upon the King. James was notoriously extravagant, and several efforts to raise revenue failed to relieve his debts. He might not have believed in Ralegh’s gold mine, but he wanted to believe.

After his return, Count Gondomar and other Spanish agents in England loudly protested the Amazon Company. At a packed meeting of the Privy Council on April 14th, 1620, the two sides met to discuss the issue. Amazon Company backers argued that the land was “a pagan wilderness where Dutch and Irish and Frenchmen had begun to settle,” and thus the company was not an affront to Philip III. Gondomar replied that in fact the area belonged to Philip III “by virtue of discovery, demarcation and possession.” It made no difference if Iberians did not people the entire land. How would the English nobles like it, he argued, if he went and colonized a vacant corner of their own grand estates?

62 Ibid.
64 “The count of Gondomar to Philip III” (30th May 1620), in English and Irish Settlement, 203.
Ultimately, James I and others agreed to forbid North to sail, but in early May he disobeyed them. North alleged that friends had told him that James had wanted him to depart secretly while seeming to keep the peace with Spain. Instead James revoked the patent, upon learning North had left and imprisoned him upon his return. The Amazon Company unraveled, though the settlers North had left behind remained.

As anti-Spanish English planned the Amazon Company, anti-Spanish Dutch also made their move. In the years leading up to the 1621 expiration of the Twelve Years Truce between Spain and the Netherlands, leading Dutch militants arrested and executed Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, the main supporter of the Truce, and held talks to discuss chartering a Dutch West India Company (WIC). While earlier proposals for the WIC had, like English plans, been centered upon colonization, the Dutch war party had something else in mind. The WIC was instead envisioned as an extension of the war. By taking the war to the Americas, Dutch leaders hoped to move the arena of fighting farther from home while forcing Spain to spend more to defend their vast New World holdings. The revenues brought in from trade would contribute to the war chest. The company was chartered on June 3, 1621 and received a twenty-four year monopoly on trade, shipping and colonization throughout the Americas, parts of West Africa, and parts of the Pacific.⁶⁵

In the case of both companies, the establishment of a monopoly was intended to bring order to the small, unorganized settlements that were already producing commodities, chiefly tobacco. They were also both established to assert their respective

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nation’s right to colonize more fully in the Americas, and especially in those places without a Spanish or Portuguese presence. For the Amazon Company, which was operating without the full support of the monarch, the gamble did not pay off. Despite official blessing, the WIC also floundered at first. Potential investors were disinclined to participate because of the company’s focus on war over trade, and the lack of enthusiasm meant that the first WIC ship did not sail until 1623.

By the time it arrived, the writing was on the wall for the colonies near the Amazon. The Portuguese, who had been building up their strength in the area, were having greater success. In 1616, they ousted the French from parts of Brazil and took over their fort, from which they led campaigns to pacify the indigenous peoples. By 1621, they controlled the southern entrance to the Amazon and organized the area into a new administrative district, Estado do Maranhão e Grão Pará.66 In 1623, the Portuguese led an attack against various Dutch, English, and Irish settlements. The expedition, made up of at least four hundred indigenous allies and far fewer Portuguese, destroyed two Dutch forts and resulted in the expulsion of Ita’s colony.67

Although the Portuguese had rooted out several colonies, others were left undiscovered, and English and Dutch enthusiasm for the area continued, even as they found surer fortunes elsewhere. In a 1637 letter, the interim governor of the Brazilian states of Maranhão and Grão Pará, Jácome Reymundo de Noronha suggested that the indigenous groups had been the key to ousting the foreigners. “One thing that is well understood is that the whole defence and strength of the conquest of Maranhão and Pará consists in the native and Indian inhabitants of those great rivers and lakes, because, if

66 This was in part due to the fact that travel from the area to the rest of Brazil was difficult.
67 English and Irish Settlement, 242-58.
they are friends and confederates with the Portuguese, neither the Dutch enemies nor other foreigners will have the power to conquer them and draw them into their friendship: and on the contrary, should they be against us, they will join whatever nation of northerners might arrive.”68 Lately, Noronha wrote, the martial success of the Portuguese had made the Indians more docile. After the Portuguese had taken a fort and killed eighty-six interlopers and their Indians allies, the remaining natives of the area were “left so terrified that they will never make alliances with the foreigners again.” The challenge nonetheless remained to hold on to what power they had because either side’s success depended entirely upon indigenous alliance. Noronha was especially worried that the English or Dutch might use the Amazon to navigate to Peru, which “they may do if they have the friendship and alliance with the natives and Indians of the territory, without which in no way will they be able to settle or set foot in the territory even if all the forces of Holland and the whole world should come.”69

Conclusions

As the Spanish and especially the Portuguese became more effective in the area, the Dutch and English channeled their efforts in other directions. By the time Noronha wrote in 1637, they had established permanent colonies in North America and the Caribbean alike. The Dutch seized part of Brazil in 1630, but not the area that had been home to the Dutch and English colonies. After maintaining a tenuous hold, the Dutch were permanently expelled in 1653.

68 “Report by Jácome Reymundo de Noronha on matter pertaining to the preservation and increase of the state of Manahão,” in England and Irish Settlement, 380.
69 Ibid., 383.
More than a testament to increased Portuguese strength, or new colonial opportunities further north, the end of this type of settlements marked a shift in English and Dutch colonial ambitions. The small-scale tobacco settlements of the Dutch, English, and others belonged to a phase of colonization that ended once the northern European governments became more involved. The settlements succeeded in the way they did because they were small and informally connected to the metropole, and while the chartering of companies allowed for a new kind of colonization, it was not the sort that had been successful in Guiana. The Dutch and English, as well as the French continued on in the Guianas in settlements marked by their small size and indigenous alliances, but they were never again the chief focus of colonial interest. No single European empire ever established dominance in the area. Instead, today the Guianas are home to nations that bear the imprint of British, Dutch, and French colonialism.

Although these colonies were failures in the short-term, they were of lasting significance for the subsequent success of the English and Dutch Empires. Many of those who had been involved in these settlements turned to other projects. Thomas Roe, the tobacco trader who financed some of the Amazon ventures was also one of the first investors in the Virginia Company. One of Roger North’s abandoned colonists, Thomas Warner, colonized St. Christopher (present-day St. Kitts), the first permanent English colony in the Caribbean. The most noteworthy émigré, though, was nicotiana tabacum, a Trinidad native carried by English planters to Virginia.

Despite the events of 1619-1621, North, Harcourt, the remaining Amazon settlers, and others continued to hold out hope for a renewed interest in colonies to the South. By 1625, Anglo-Spanish relations had soured, and England had a new king, Charles I, who
might be more amenable to the project. North and Harcourt, former rivals, joined together on a new venture, the Guiana Company. North presented a narrative for the royal councilors, explaining what had gone wrong with the Amazon Company and blaming Gondomar for the demise of an otherwise promising enterprise.\textsuperscript{70} Both men also promoted the company to the public. Harcourt published a new edition of his \textit{Relation} in February 1626, and North printed a prospectus for the company the following month. The patent for the Guiana Company, issued in May of 1627, granted the two control of a large territory, “from the River of Wiapoco Southwarde to the River of Amazons and from thence further Southwards to five degrees of latitude” and stretching “from Sea to Sea.”\textsuperscript{71}

Once again, Harcourt and North became caught between their visions for the colony and what investors and the King wanted to hear. Although they planned to develop sugar plantations, North’s prospectus offers a measured assessment of other potential riches: “some peeces of Metall have bee found wore by the Indians which were mixed with a third part Gold.”\textsuperscript{72} A few pieces of metal that were one third gold did not draw in as many investors as anticipated, and the Guiana Company suffered.

Most importantly, the Atlantic World looked very different in 1626 than it had in 1619. In 1619, Virginia had around 700 settlers left, out of thousands sent from England. Just seven years later, it had over two thousand. By 1629, when the first ship sent out by the Guiana Company finally arrived in South America, English settlers had founded colonies at Plymouth in North America and on the Caribbean islands of Barbados,

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{70}]“A summary relation concerning the patent for the River of Amazones & the countrie & coast adjoying” (1625), in \textit{ibid.}, 276-7.
\item[\textsuperscript{71}]“Extract from the patent of the Guiana Company, Issued 19/29 May 1627,” in \textit{ibid.}, 295.
\item[\textsuperscript{72}]“Roger North’s prospectus for the Guiana Company, issued circa March 1626,” \textit{ibid.}, 285.
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Bermuda, Nevis, and of course, St. Christopher. South American settlements now had to compete with a host of others. Even worse, as the company was being charted, the news spread to England that the Portuguese had ousted several groups of settlers from along the Amazon. This event helped bring the river into “Brazil” and out of “Guiana” in the geographic imagination.

Although the small-scale settlements that had proved most successful there were not the future of English imperial expansion, Guiana continued to fascinate. In a 1660 work, the author argued that while the English have “bestowed much tyme, labour, and cost on Plantations in the Charibdien Eyalnds, butt have nott beene soo well informed of better progresses to bee made under the best clime of the firme Land on the Coast of America,” Guiana.  

Guiana particularly stood as an example of a place where conflict with indigenous peoples had been largely avoided. Reflecting on the progress of English colonization around 1668, John Scott wrote:

I have also observed the Indians to have a great sense of the Injuries they have sustained from the Europeans, where their countryes have been envaded, and they are strict computers of the wrongs they sustaine from any nation so that unless all power be taken from them, they are apt enough for revenge. You will finde all along the following story that the Christians have ever first injur’d them, and that it hath cost much blood to wrest away those Countries by force where God and nature had given them a propriety; whiles such people as have purchased their lands fairely, or that they have invited to cohabit with them have liv’d in great peace and enjoyed a kind neighbourhood.

For Scott, Guiana exemplified such a place. After the affinity of the natives was won by Walter Ralegh, the English were ever after welcomed. Because the English showed “great Justice and moderation” to their Indian hosts, they won them over and were

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73 Balthazar Gerbier Kyt Douvily, *A Sommary Description Manifesting that greater Profits are to bee done in the hott than in the could parts off the Coast off America* (Rotterdam, 1660).

74 Bodleian Library, MS. Rawlinson A. 175, folio 372, John Scott, “Preface to an intended history of America,” 21.
allowed to live among them in peace, “which neither the French not Spaniard could ever
do by force of Armes.” A 1670 work agreed that the natives of Guiana not only hated
the Spanish but that they view the English as “their guard against their enemies.”

When the Dutch West India Company was chartered by the States-General in
June of 1621, it was conceived with more martial aims than its counterpart in the east.
Rather than simply encouraging trade, the WIC’s aims were to directly attack and seize
parts of the Spanish and Portuguese empires. In emphasizing war over trade, the States-
General largely rejected the plans put forth by Willem Usselincx years before and instead
favored a proposal suggested by the States of Holland in 1618. The military goals of the
WIC actually worked to discourage investors; the company did not raise enough capital
to begin operations until 1623. Previously, Dutch activity in South America concentrated
on places just out of the reach of Iberian settlements. The WIC instead focused on
Brazil.

For divergent reasons, then, once the English and Dutch states took a more formal
role in Atlantic expansion, Guiana was not a focus of their activities. The English focused
on places farther from the Spanish, which the Dutch deliberately sought confrontation
with them. Yet, northern European activity in the area did not cease.

75 Ibid, 23.
76 John Oxenbridge, A Seasonable Proposition of Propagating the Gospel by Christian Colonies in the
77 Meuwese, “Brothers in Arms,” 25.
Chapter Five

Planting Colonies: The Upstart Empires’ Permanent Settlements

The 1620 failure of the Amazon Company marked a turning point in Northern European colonization of South America. Disappointment in Guiana, however, led to new possibilities elsewhere. By the 1620s, the English, French, and Dutch had all established permanent colonies in North America and the Caribbean. While these settlements are often treated as new beginnings, this chapter will demonstrate the economic and personal connections they had with South America and show the importance of tobacco to these colonies.

The chapter will conclude with a discussion of Virginia, the colony that many in the United States associate with tobacco. Founded in 1607, Virginia was the first permanent English colony in North America, but it was not created from nothing. It built upon earlier attempts, both in the Chesapeake and the wider Atlantic World.¹ Neither was Virginia an unaltered continuation of previous efforts. The colony failed to learn some

crucial lessons from English experiences in Guiana, and even in the Chesapeake itself. These lessons that were taken up more seriously in other settlements.

St. Christopher and the Caribbean

The most direct connection between Roger North’s failed, temporary colony and a permanent, successful one is St. Christopher (most commonly known today as St. Kitts). The first Caribbean colony of both the English and the French, St. Christopher was founded as a direct result of the collapse of the Amazon Company and North’s colony. St. Christopher is a sixty-eight square mile island in the Leewards of the Lesser Antilles. A mountain rage at the island’s center hinders agriculture; only about half of the island, or 24,000 acres, is cultivatable.\(^2\) A group known to archaeologists as the Archaic People was the island’s first inhabitants, arriving around 3000 BCE.\(^3\) Around 800 BCE, agricultural ceramic-making groups known as Saladoid arrived from the Orinoco River Basin. An Arawak group from the same region migrated circa 1000 CE.\(^4\) Three centuries later, the Kalinago or Island Caribs replaced the Arawaks.\(^5\) They called the island


\(^4\) Ibid.

\(^5\) The so-called “island Caribs” are descended from mainland Caribs, a fact they themselves confirmed to seventeenth century European chroniclers. At the time of European arrival, they were expanding their territorial holdings in the Caribbean. Raymond Breton, Dictionaire caraïbe-français, Meslé de quantité de Remarques historiques pour l'esclaircissement de la Langue (Auxerre: Gilles Bouquet, 1665).
Liamuga, fertile land, one hint as to why this tiny island was chosen by Europeans over others.

As the Amazon Company fell apart in England, its settlers thousands of miles away received no word. The very lack of a returning supply ship was likely a sign something had gone wrong. The colonists were “destitute of any supplyes from England,” but had “releefe” from Dutch ships that “gave what they pleased and tooke what they list.”⁶ Despite the hardships, many insisted upon staying rather than returning in a passing vessel. In 1622, three men departed “to be free from the disorders that did grow in the Amazons for want of Government amongst their Countrey-men.”⁷ They were led by Thomas Warner, a younger son of a Suffolk landowner who had served in the bodyguard of James I and at the Tower of London before leaving for the Amazon in 1620. Thomas Warner left North’s colony because it was poorly supported. He seems to have thought that the Amazon settlement could have been a successful tobacco colony, but that the lack of support from the crown led to its demise. A fellow colonist with some experience in the Indies, Captain Thomas Painton, suggested a small Caribbean island would prevent attack and desertion alike.⁸ The Spanish, whose intervention in the Amazon Company had led to its demise, also had a less plausible claim to the Leeward Islands.

The group first scouted the Caribbean to choose the best island. When Warner arrived at St. Christopher, he found the Kalinago leader, Tegreman, friendly. Perhaps,

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⁷ Ibid., 224-33. The other two men were John Rhodes and Thomas Bims.

⁸ Ibid.; Nellis Crouse, *French Pioneers in the West Indies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 90. According to John Smith, Painton and a few others stayed on in North’s old colony.
too, he discovered that Liamuga did indeed have more fertile soil than neighboring islands. Warner and the two men who had left the Amazon colony with him stayed on the island for about a year. After returning to England to find investors, Warner and a group of fifteen potential settlers set out on a ship bound for Virginia in 1623, where they stayed for several months before proceeding to St. Christopher. Warner, his wife and son, and about fourteen other colonists arrived on the island in January 1624. Upon their arrival, they planted tobacco. The first crop was destroyed by a hurricane in September but a second crop was loaded onto a ship sent by Warner’s backers in March 1625. Like in Guiana, St. Christopher’s inhabitants could grow two crops of tobacco a year. By 1628, Warner had a “great tobaccoe house” that stood windward of his home.

The settlement of Caribbean islands signaled an important move in English colonization efforts, a pivot towards islands and agriculture. The widespread belief that the South American interior held great riches initially fueled English interest in the region. The same was true of North America. Yet, as early as 1609, the Guiana colonizer Robert Harcourt was positing tobacco alone as the path to riches. He admonished his men (and even himself) for the “greedy desire for Gold,” when they instead sought fabled gold and gems. Lauren Benton has argued that islands, “naturally bounded spaces that could

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be thoroughly discovered and surveyed,” offered colonizers a chance to “simplify the process of taking possession and making dominion transparent.”13 The colonization of St. Christopher and other Caribbean islands illustrates this motivation. Yet a small, bounded island imposes limits. While Virginia’s investors held onto dreams of gold mines, spices, and silk for decades, Warner and his colonists knew that St. Christopher held no such riches. Instead, they came with the sole purpose of establishing plantations, and tobacco was the crop they knew best. Warner’s forward-thinking colony was more deeply committed to cultivation than those that had come before. The settlement of St. Christopher presaged the future of northern European Atlantic empires based on agricultural rather than mineral wealth.

In 1625, Warner returned to England to secure a patent for his colonization of St. Christopher and neighboring islands. To prove the viability of the nascent colony, he brought 9,500 pounds of tobacco with him. During his stay, Warner found additional investors and made connections with London merchants. At a meeting of the Privy Council on September 13, Warner and Ralph Merrifield, a London merchant who had backed Warner and his colonists in the colony’s early years, were given a commission to colonize St. Christopher.14 When Warner returned to the island the next year, he brought “neere an hundred” additional colonists.15

By the time Warner made the trip, the English were no longer the only ones trying to colonize the small island. Sometime in early 1625, a French privateer commanded by

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14 “Commission, reciting the discovery of St. Christopher, as Merwar’s Hope, Nevis, Barbadoes, and Montserrat, by Thos. Warner. Southampton,” NAUK CO 1/3, No. 44, September 13, 1625.
Pierre Belan, sieur d’Esnambuc, badly damaged from a fight with a Spanish ship stopped on the island for repairs. By then, Warner’s relationship with the Caribs deteriorated, and he may have persuaded the French to stay. The French also had a prior claim to the island, as a few Frenchmen were already living there when the English arrived. Like Warner and other colonists who established permanent settlements, d’Esnambuc had experience in the Americas. For two decades, he sailed to the Caribbean as a trader and privateer before deciding to try his hand at colonization. Also like Warner, he too went back to Europe with tobacco to seek permission to colonize.

D’Esnambuc and his associate Urbain du Roissy arrived in France in 1626. In October, the two met with the powerful statesman Cardinal Richelieu, whom King Louis XIII had recently appointed Grand Master of Navigation and Commerce, a position placing him in charge of all maritime affairs. His first act was to grant a patent to the two, and as an extra measure of his faith in the enterprise, Richelieu became their largest shareholder. France gave D’Esnambuc and Roissy permission to settle islands between the eleventh and eighteenth parallels—including the island they called Sainte-Christophe—and commissioned them to convert natives and cultivate the land. They, too, found financial backers and recruited 322 colonists for the trip back to the Caribbean. There is no record of exactly how much tobacco they brought back to

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16 According to Smith’s *True Travels*, there were three Frenchmen on the island who initially “sought to oppose Captain Warner and set the Indians against us; but at last we all became friends,” Smith, *Complete Works*, III: 228. Smith was not there but seems to be using a narrative of someone who was there, thus the use of the first person here.


19 Although this would seem to give the French a head start, about half of the colonists died on the way back or shortly after landing. The trip was so disastrous that Du Roissy soon had to return with another ship
France. It was enough that when they sold it, the men bought new clothing, rented a coach and horses to travel to meet with backers, and otherwise threw around money to convince potential investors that their colony was already a success.

St. Christopher was a compelling location for the English and the French, but why did the Caribs allow them to come when previous colonization efforts on similar islands had failed?\footnote{See, for example, the attempted 1605 colonization of St. Lucia described in Chapter Four.} At least a few Europeans had settled on St. Christopher previously, including the Frenchman there when Warner arrived. The natives of St. Christopher would also have had contact with passing ships and they likely traded tobacco in exchange for other goods. Having a very small number of Europeans on the island, then, would have facilitated future trade. When Warner came with two others, Tegreman likely saw the benefit. Even the natives of Dominica, who had a fierce reputation and prevented permanent settlement until 1690, allowed a few Europeans to live among them.

In attempting to forge an alliance with Tegreman, Warner followed a pattern established in South American settlements like the one from which he had come. Yet the relationships that worked in the Guianas were bound to fail on St. Christopher. Tegreman and his people might have allowed a handful of Europeans to live among them, but Warner’s group of three was soon fourteen. They built a fort, signaling more clearly their intentions to their hosts. The Kalinago of St. Christopher were not subject to the sorts of pressures that compelled indigenous groups on the mainland to ally with Europeans. The English and French could not offer military assistance against the Spanish or other enemies. The Kalinago did not need allies against enemy peoples, so the strategy deployed elsewhere proved ineffective. In addition, perhaps Warner and his fellow
colonists, some of whom were experienced tobacco cultivators, felt they needed less indigenous assistance than before. Tobacco plantations required labor, but the Kalinago had no incentive to provide it.

Tensions between the two sides mounted quickly. In 1626, an indigenous informant warned the English that the Caribs were planning to kill them. Instead, the English attacked first, killing Tegreman and many others. The colonists drove the survivors from the island in canoes, but a force of Caribs returned to avenge them the next year, after the French had arrived.

Repelling the Carib attack was one of the first joint actions by the English and French. It inaugurated a decades-long relationship between the two sides, which continued a custom of intra-European alliances common in the South American settlements. They divided the island, with the English taking the mountainous middle and the French occupying either end. In 1627, Warner, Du Roissy, and d’Esnambuc met to discuss how St. Christopher would be governed. They created an agreement that stipulated how the two groups would share resources, dispense justice, maintain defense, and achieve their common goal of growing tobacco. For the next several decades, when the colonies appointed a new governor or the settlers deemed a meeting necessary, the agreement would be updated.

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The island was divided, but the settlers moved throughout. The saltpans on the French part of the island and the sulphur mine in the English portion were held in common use. The forests, too, were shared, and when the agreement was updated in 1655 the governors also worked together to set limits on how much settlers could cut. Roads were also held in common use. In fact, both sides regularly had to go into the others’ territory to get to the rest of their own: the French quarters were on either end of the island, while the English territory had a mountain in the middle that was easier to go around (and into the French area) than over.

The governors agreed to work jointly on several economic policies. Together, they would decide if they should trade with approaching ships. If the vessel were from England or France, the governor from that country would set the prices, “but if here come any flimmish ship,” they concluded, “ye 3 governours shall conclude together & Set a price upon his merchandize.” The 1655 renewal of the treaty between the two added a regulation that a merchant had to charge the same price to everyone regardless of nationality and that the governors had the right to set a ceiling on prices. At least once, the governors of St. Christopher worked together to curb rather than encourage tobacco cultivation. In 1639, when production had spread to other islands, they worried it would become unprofitable and agreed to stop growing it for eighteen months. The English and French governors on St. Christopher, however, were unable to get their respective counterparts on Antigua and Guadeloupe to comply.


25 Higham, Development of the Leeward Islands, 34.
Sharing the island necessitated that the two sides work together to maintain order and defend the island. The original treaty stipulated that a joint jury would try any lawbreakers. Slaves and criminals who ran away to another part of the island were extradited. The earliest agreements struck on the island provided for the two to work together in case the Spanish invaded or Caribs attacked. Intriguingly, the agreement also stipulated that war between the two countries in Europe need not lead to conflict on the island. So, from around the mid-1620s, French and English colonists on St. Christopher, thousands of miles from the metropole, and generally poorly supported by them, worked together to make the island habitable and profitable.

The colonists of St. Christopher soon had recourse to invoke this aspect of the treaty. On September 29, 1629, the Spanish General Don Fadrique de Toledo led the attack that is recounted at the opening of this dissertation. The Spanish did not crush the colony, but their attempt to evict the French and English permanently demonstrates that even as late as 1629, they continued to assert their right to the Americas and act against northern European interlopers.

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Although neighboring islands eventually eclipsed St. Christopher’s strategic and economic value, we should not overlook its early importance. As the first Caribbean colony of both nations, it served as base for future settlements. The original colonists often led expeditions to other islands. The English settled Nevis, two miles away, in 1628, Antigua and Montserrat in 1632, Anguilla in 1650, and Tortola in 1672. The
French colonized Guadeloupe and Martinique in 1635, St. Martin and St. Barthélemy in 1648, and St. Croix in 1650. Both English and French referred to St. Christopher as the mother colony of the Caribbean.

St. Christopher also maintained connections with Guiana colonies in its earliest years. In 1626, a group of 534 men, women, and children from La Rochelle, France set out for the Americas. La Rochelle was a fortress town on the Atlantic Ocean that over several centuries had been granted privileges stronger than that of any other French municipality. Its economic, martial, and political independence and its ties with the broader world in general and England specifically eventually led to the city to Protestantism and colonial adventures alike. By the 1620s, the city’s residents were openly revolting against the crown and this unrest was likely a motivating factor for the 1626 colonists, who left the city just before the 1627-28 siege that led to the termination of the city’s privileges. The group settled in Guiana and stayed for three years before abandoning their settlement because of sickness and conflict with indigenous groups. From there, they sailed for St. Christopher.

The French and English allied not only with one another but also with the Dutch. Because the colonists were poorly supported by their homelands, especially initially, they often worked with Dutch merchants to sell their tobacco. When the Spanish raided the island in 1629, the colony was saved only because a Dutch ship offered them supplies in

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27 Neil Kamil describes it as having “unequaled autonomy among municipalities in France until 1628, but, most threatening to those from the kingdom’s center, the history of these privileges carried with it the mark of Englishness and the outre-mer world.” Neil Kamil, *Fortress of the Soul: Violence, Metaphysics, and Material Life in the Huguenots’ New World, 1517-1751* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2005), 32.

28 La Rochelle also provided colonists for the 1555 Brazilian colony, France Antarctique. *Ibid.*, 135-139.

29 BL Sloane MSS 3662, ff. 37b-42b; “The Discription of Guyana,” in *Colonising Expeditions*, 141.
exchange for a future shipment of tobacco. The relationship was more formal than just taking advantage of passing ships, though, as at least a few Dutch merchants lived on the island. The regularity with which the French governor consigned tobacco to Dutch rather than French merchants nearly led to his removal but for his absolute refusal to step down. By the 1640s, while France was in a state of political unrest, the Dutch sold slaves to the French Caribbean settlers, marketed the colonies’ goods, and provided them with credit. According to the contemporary writer Du Tertre, some of the richest Caribbean planters bought the Dutch title of burgher. Meanwhile, some of the “real” burghers in Zeeland called these French settlers “their planters.”

On occasion, the homes of Dutch traders were used as neutral places to sort out differences between the French and English. The alliances that marked the earlier phase of Caribbean trade and settlement continued well beyond the establishment of formal, permanent colonies.

While the two groups’ arrangements were pragmatic, they seem to have been meaningful and important to the colonists. At one point, the two sides decided to erect a stone monument with the arms of England on one side, and those of France on the other. In another document, they express their wish to “continue freindshipp and Concord and Good Intelligence betweene the two Nations, Though notwithstanding it may be supposed that in Europe there are Divisions between the two Crownes which

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32 For more on Dutch-English collaboration in general, including the presence of Dutch merchants visiting and living on St. Christopher, see Koot, Empire at the Periphery.

33 BL MS Egerton 2395 f. 40.
ought not to Cause a Rupture between the Two Nations In America.” In fact, the two sides hoped that their arrangement on St. Christopher might serve as a model for all the Caribbean islands. The French and English cooperation did not happen in a vacuum, but against the backdrop of the political situation in Europe and the Caribbean.

Sometime in the 1640s, the French governor, Phillipe de Longvilliers de Poincy, wrote to Warner to complain about the English colonization of other Caribbean islands. Poincy considered this an affront to their agreement and urged Warner to curtail it. The basis of his complaint, though, was that the English had planted good tobacco that was ready to make a profit. This reason, rather than fear of armed conflict or a loss of opportunity for French colonization, was the only one Poincy cited. These colonists still understood tobacco cultivation as the first step in all future endeavors.

New Netherland and the Dutch Atlantic

Tobacco cultivation was also important in less obvious places, far from the Caribbean. New Netherland, north of prime tobacco-growing regions, nonetheless produced tobacco in its earliest years. Multiple times during his 1609 exploratory voyage, Henry Hudson and his crew encountered groups who presented tobacco to trade for

34 Ibid., f. 349.

35 Since both the French and English had colonized other islands by this point, the exact reason for Poincy’s complaint is unclear; perhaps Warner’s contingent had colonized without letting him know, or maybe the governor feared another glut in the tobacco market.

36 BL Egerton MS 2597, f. 192, “Chevalier de Poincy, French Governor of St. Christopher's, to M. Warnard, Général des Isles de l'Amerique.”

37 Russell R. Menard, “Plantation Empire: How Sugar and Tobacco Planters Built Their Industries and Raised an Empire,” Agricultural History 81, no. 3 (Summer 2007), 309-32.
knives, beads, and other goods. New Netherland was initially just a trading post where furs were the primary good, but by 1624, Dutch began to settle there. Farmers usually grew tobacco and maize to prepare new ground for planting, crops thought to “break in” the soil. They would grow one of these crops in the first year and plant something else in subsequent years. New Netherland’s colonists also established tobacco plantations. In 1631, the patroon Killaen van Rensselaer brought Marijn Adriaensz van Veere and four farmhands to Rensselaerswijk to do just that. After Adriaensz’s slow start, Rensselaer recruited planters from Nijkerk, in the Netherlands, where tobacco cultivation was already several years old.

Although Rensselaer and others tried to recruit experienced tobacco farmers, New Netherland tobacco was initially of poor quality. The reason may be the recruitment of these cultivators. Dutch farmers were just one group who arrived in New Netherland with experience. Another influential cohort was English from Virginia. One, a young man named Rutger Moris, assisted Rensselaer’s farmers. English names also frequently appear in contracts. These planters, however, were familiar with hotter climates, and this might have led them to make mistakes in cultivation. Dutch cultivators used sheep manure, high in nitrogen and potassium, but in New Netherland, less fertile horse manure prevailed. In


40 Jacobs, Colony of New Netherland, 124-5.
Rensselaerwijk, near present-day Albany, the growing season was especially short, and Moris might have introduced “inappropriate farming practices.”

If the Dutch had been able to learn from indigenous cultivators, they likely would have been better equipped to deal with the climate they encountered. However, along the lower Hudson, the Dutch had especially poor relationships with indigenous peoples. In his work on Dutch-indigenous alliances, Mark Meuwese argues that the Lower Hudson River, site of New Amsterdam and other Dutch settlements, was “the only frontier of the Dutch Atlantic where indigenous people experienced a decline in power,” since Europeans came in large numbers, displacing the native Munsee. This was a stark contrast with the strong alliances smaller groups of Dutch settlers built with native peoples in Guiana, and even in northern parts of New Netherland, where the powerful Five Nations demanded Dutch acceptance of their own diplomatic norms.

41 Ibid., 125.
Despite a slow start, farmers in the Netherlands persisted in their efforts to make good tobacco and by the late 1630s had some success. By that time, there were several small tobacco plantations on Manhattan and Long Island, perhaps producing thirty-five thousand pounds. The colony appointed a tobacco inspector in 1638 to help ensure good quality. New Netherland consciously competed with Virginia tobacco, and Adriaen van der Donck claimed in 1655 that it:

"is lovely and fragrant, differs little in flavor from Varinas, and though the latter is better, the difference is more in the price than in the quality. It may well be the next best to Varinas and by many is considered superior to Virginian tobacco. Many expect, and it is

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43 This estimate is Jacobs’s conservative guess and is for 1639. Jacobs, *Colony of New Netherland*, 126.
indeed likely, that as the population multiplies there and more tobacco is planted, the product will gain in renown and prominence, and the defect in flavor, attributed by some solely to impurity of the soil as a result of hasty cultivation, will be entirely removed or much diminished.”

New Netherland never grew large quantities of tobacco, but the importance of the crop to the colony’s identity is conveyed in an image from around 1640, which shows leaf and roll tobacco and enslaved Africans laboring in the background.

Figure 25: "Nieu Nederlandt," c. 1640

The Dutch also developed an important role as tobacco traders from roughly 1625 to 1675. As related above, the Dutch arrived to save St. Christopher after the Spanish attack by offering them supplies on credit and agreeing to return for their crop. The

44 Van der Donck, Description, 28.
history of that colony demonstrates shared imperial objectives for the French and English in the Caribbean. On that island, the Dutch began to develop an alternate approach to tobacco that foreshadows how their global empire would depart from the settler colony model. Like the English, the Dutch began several settlements devoted to tobacco cultivation in South America. Also like the English, they gradually withdrew from settlements in the northern part of Brazil to establish what would become the Dutch colonies of Suriname and Essequibo in the Guianas.45

On St. Christopher, however, the Dutch were largely traders. They purchased the settlers’ tobacco and coordinated with the Dutch vessels that came to collect it. While the Dutch produced sugar and tobacco in Brazil and held some Caribbean islands, their presence was slight by comparison. Some of the islands served primarily as warehouses for goods and way stations for the enslaved than sites of production.46

In Virginia, too, the Dutch played the role of tobacco traders beginning in the 1620s. They offered more efficient methods of shipping, gave better prices, bought in bulk, and advanced long-term credit. By the 1640s, several Dutch merchant families had become more closely linked with the colony through residence, intermarriage, and cultivating the friendship of elites. The Dutch commanded an ever-growing portion of the Virginian tobacco market.47 As London merchants railed against the presence of the

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45 Although the Dutch temporarily held part of Brazil, it was a different area than they had previously colonized.

46 Curacao, for example, had some agriculture but its main industry was the slave trade. Ships would arrive from Africa and the enslaved would be sold in Willemstad and taken elsewhere.

Dutch, planters defended their right to free trade. When that line of argument failed, the two sides sometimes resorted to moving goods through nearby New Netherland to circumvent regulations.

Although the Dutch grew less tobacco in the New World, they developed new ways of marketing and blending it that did involve cultivation. In the countryside outside of Amersfoort, near Utrecht, farmers began growing it around 1610. The resulting product was not as good as what the Dutch bought in Virginia or on St. Christopher, but when it was blended with superior leaves, the result was reasonably good tobacco at an excellent price.48 While the Dutch and English both had thriving tobacco colonies in South America, its cultivation became far more important in English settlements. Amsterdam nonetheless became a center for the global tobacco commerce. The Dutch tobacco trade anticipates what would become the Netherlands’ broader imperial strategy in the later seventeenth century.

A 1653 letter from South Africa indicates other ways that tobacco had quickly become enmeshed in global empire. Jan van Riebeeck, the first colonial administrator of the Cape Town colony, wrote the Dutch East India Company to request copper and Caribbean tobacco to lure the Khoe Khoe indigenous group to work for and trade with them. He writes that tobacco is preferable, since it is a consumable. The native people might get enough copper eventually, but they will always want more tobacco. To trade without tobacco, van Riebeeck writes, is hardly possible.49 Van Riebeeck’s letter


49 I am indebted to Susanah Shaw Romney for directing me to this source and taking notes on it in the archive. The original is: Letter, J. van Riebeeck to VOC Bewinthebberen, 14 April 1653, Uitgaande Brieven, C1317, pp. 50-93, Western Cape Archives and Record Service, Cape Town, South Africa.
demonstrates how quickly tobacco had become an essential commodity for both Western Africans and European empires.

Virginia

Ultimately, it was not New Netherland or St. Christopher that came to be synonymous with tobacco, but Virginia. Traditional histories of the United States regularly posit Virginia as a new beginning, the first permanent colony of the English, and the start of the nation. These histories also argue that tobacco saved the colony from failure, typically crediting the settler John Rolfe, husband of Pocahontas, with its introduction.\(^5\) The conventional narrative of early Virginia does disservice both to the broader Atlantic experience of the English and to the specific conditions, environmental and social, which the Jamestown settlers encountered. Tobacco culture in Virginia was a product of both factors. The remainder of this chapter will provide an overview of the settlement, and then explore how it followed patterns established in South America and elsewhere, and the ways in which it departed from them. With respect to tobacco cultivation, it will show what knowledge settlers arrived with, what they learned from Powhatan tutors, and what changes they implemented to transform Virginia into the foremost tobacco colony in the Atlantic World.

\(^5\) For just one an example of such a treatment, taken from a textbook edited by prominent historians, including one who has written on tobacco in colonial Virginia: “The economic solution to Virginia’s problems grew in the vacant lots of Jamestown. Only Indians bothered to cultivate tobacco until John Rolfe, a settler who achieved notoriety by marrying Pocahontas, realized this local weed might be a valuable export. Rolfe experimented with the crop, eventually growing in Virginia a milder variety than had been developed in the West Indies and more appealing to European smokers…Virginians suddenly possessed a means to make money. Tobacco proved relatively easy to grow, and settlers who had avoided work now threw themselves into its production with single-minded diligence.” Robert A. Divine, T. H. Breen, George M. Fredrickson, R. Hal Williams, Ariela J. Gross, and H. W. Brands, *The American Story* 4th edn. (Boston: Longman, 2011), 35.
In 1606, King James I awarded a patent for the London-based Virginia Company that allowed them “to make Habitation, Plantation, and to deduce a colony of sundry of our People into that part of America commonly called VIRGINIA.”\(^{51}\) With it, he set in motion a series of events that would lead to the permanent English colonization of North America. As recounted in Chapter One, Virginia—which according to the patent ran from Cape Fear to Long Island Sound—had been a focus of English colonial efforts since the 1580s.\(^{52}\) After the failure of the Elizabethan settlements, interest in Virginia lapsed for a few years but was revived again by the formation of a joint-stock company. The charter, in fact, created two such companies—the Virginia Company of London took the southern part and the Plymouth Company the northern. Investors formed several such companies in this period for the purposes of foreign trade, including one for Guiana. At the time of its charter, Virginia offered no greater promise than Guiana or the Amazon, and some contemporaries considered its prospects much poorer. The 1619 charter of the Amazon Company shows that over a decade after its founding, the English had by no means decided that North America was a more viable site for colonization than South. Only in hindsight did the activities prompted by the charter come to have such meaning.

Many of Virginia’s promoters and investors had a stake in South America as well. The most obvious connection between the two places runs through Walter Ralegh. His failures in both places helped fashion his image as a man concerned with the glory of England but perhaps more prideful than wise. Yet, it was partly thanks to Ralegh’s work

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to popularize Virginia and Guiana that both places persisted in the English imagination despite these calamities.

One of the first men named to the Royal Council of Virginia as well as to the council of the Virginia Company was Thomas Roe, later ambassador to the Mughal Empire. His initial investment of £60, among the highest, demonstrates his commitment to Virginia. Yet Roe was also involved in Guiana during this period. In 1610, he sailed there on behalf of Ralegh, then imprisoned, to find sources of gold. Failing that, he bought tobacco at Trinidad and left settlers along the Amazon to grow their own, keeping a portion of the profits. Roe’s simultaneous involvement in projects in North and South America suggest that he imagined them to be equally viable.

The captains and sailors the company selected for the Virginia voyages typically had experience in the Caribbean, the Spanish Main, and tobacco. Christopher Newport, who commanded the first fleet that sailed to Jamestown, had traveled to the Americas nearly every year since 1595. His initial forays were as a pirate, preying on the Spanish Caribbean. After England signed a peace treaty with Spain in 1603, he came to trade peacefully. Newport was among the seven men named to the original council, and he both returned to Virginia and had a financial stake in the colony.

George Somers, a captain mentioned in the first Virginia Company charter, likewise had experience in the Americas. Somers captained the *Sea Venture*, a ship that

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54 For Roe as tobacco trader, see Chapter Three of this dissertation. For his Amazon colony, see Chapter Four. For his involvement in the Virginia Company see: *A Declaration of the State of the Colony and Affaires in Virginia. With the Names of the Adventurers, and Summes adventured in that Action, by his Maiesties Cownseil for Virginia* (London: 1620).

55 Strachan, “Roe, Sir Thomas,” *ODNB*.
formed part of the 1609 Third Supply and was shipwrecked on Bermuda before finally making its way to Virginia. Somers had been a privateer in the Caribbean since the 1580s. In 1595, he was a senior officer in Amyas Preston’s sack of San Jago de Leon, near present-day Caracas. His ship was intended to travel to Guiana with Ralegh, but was separated from the others and so instead of hunting for El Dorado, they attacked Caracas. Preston therefore was familiar not just with the Caribbean but also with coastal Venezuela. Somers, Preston, Newport, and other experienced shipmen likely traded tobacco, too.

What motivated these and other people to invest in Virginia? Why did James commit to the project, when both before and after 1606 he demurred from approving similar proposals? The prior English claim to and settlement in the region provides a partial answer; James might have thought it would provide a rebuttal to any Spanish protests. For James, the prospect of colonial riches was a constant temptation in the face of his insolvency. The other investors and supporters had varied motivations. Some thought Virginia would make a good base from which to surreptitiously raid the Spanish. The Virginia Company offered comparatively cheap shares, which attracted many investors. 57

Most writings on Virginia, declared the land itself most appealing. As outlined in Chapter One, the English imagined that Virginia would produce commodities like those that grew in Spanish America, especially sugar. In the “Epistle Dedicatarie” of Virginia Richly Valued, Richard Hakluyt expounded upon the possible commodities the region

56 “The Victorious Voyage of Captaine Amias Preston now knight, and Captaine George Sommer to the West Indies begun in March 1595,” in Richard Hakluyt, The principal nauigations, voyages, traffiques and discoueries of the English nation.... (London, 1599-1600), 578-83.
57 Kupperman, Jamestown Project, 192.
might offer. While some were plant-based, like dyestuffs and silk, most were not.

Hakulyt guessed, based on Spanish sources, that Virginia might have “mines of copper,” or “excellent perles,” and might offer a route to the Pacific. The Virginia Company itself promoted the colony as a place possessing such riches.

Virginia was also a focus for finding a route to Asia, the fabled Northwest Passage. A desire to obtain directly goods England bought through middlemen drove its colonization in the Americas. Elizabethan colonial promoters like Richard Hakluyt argued, “that by these colonies the Northwest passage to Cathay and China may easily quickly and perfectly be searched out.” The Virginia Company also aimed to discover a route to Asia. By 1610, Spanish intelligence reported that, “the natives of Virginia assure the English that they can easily take them to the South-Sea by three routes.” A belief in the existence of a rich interior motivated the exploration of both Guiana and Virginia. What Europeans did not know drove their interest in these places as much as what they did know.

Three ships set out from England for Virginia in December 1606. In April, they arrived at Puerto Rico to take on provisions. They also stopped at Dominica, where they traded for tobacco with Caribs. On April 26, they arrived at a place they named Cape Henry, after the Prince of Wales, a colonial enthusiast. The group erected a cross but a group of Chesapeake Indians quickly drove the English back onto their ships. Unlike the

58 Richard Hakluyt, *Virginia Richly Valued* (London, 1609). The rest of the text is a translation of an anonymous account in Portuguese of Florida, “Relacam verdadeira…”


alliance-seeking Indians that northern Europeans found in South America, those groups the English met along the coast were hostile. On May 14, 1607, the group selected the malarial Jamestown Island as the site of their settlement.

The early, disastrous years of the Jamestown settlement are a staple of colonial histories. Classic accounts and many primary sources portray the colonists as work-shy gentlemen who refused to do the most basic tasks that might have averted disaster. Death rates were disastrous for many years, and the colonists failed to produce anything to make their home profitable or habitable. Instead, they relied upon Indians, with whom they had a precarious relationship, to provide them with food. During the worst winter, over four hundred of the colony’s five hundred settlers died. From the moment the English came to the region, their expectations were dashed.62

More recent reappraisals of the settlement have been more generous to the settlers on charges of lazy unpreparedness, if less forgiving on their relationships with indigenous peoples. Archaeologists working with tree-ring data discovered that “the most severe seven-year regional drought in the last 770 years occurred between 1606 and 1612.”63 The severe drought made food production difficult, and the English brought copper to trade with the Powhatan for corn.64 Understanding Jamestown in a broader Atlantic context also helps to put English actions into perspective. Just a few years before, Charles Leigh established a colony on the Wiapoco River and arranged with the Yaos to provide

his people with food in exchange for help fighting the Caribs. In this context, it was not so unreasonable for the Jamestown settlers to expect they might make a similar bargain.

The colonists failed, however, to understand how different the environment and culture of Jamestown was from Guiana. Virginia is warm, but tropical Guiana has two growing seasons. The Powhatans knew seasons of plenty but also of want. The leanest time of all was after the corn reserves were gone and the summer fruits had not yet appeared. John Smith recorded that food was scarce enough during this time to cause the people to become much thinner. Incidentally, the English first arrived at Jamestown in late April. In northern colonial spaces, needy newcomers drained resources.

In their relationships with indigenous peoples, the English experience in Virginia also departed from that in Guiana. Like the settlers there, they initially hoped they could forge easy alliances, but geopolitical circumstances prohibited it. Intriguingly, as in Guiana, previous native encounters with the Spanish set the tone for the relationship between the English and the Powhatans. These interactions, however, went quite differently than those in Guiana, leading to a different outcome. For much of the sixteenth century, the Spanish showed great interest in the Chesapeake. Some thought a strait ran from it, dipping south close to Mexico. Keeping the Chesapeake free of foreign influence was therefore vital. It was also strategically important for its proximity to Florida. In 1561, a Spanish ship entered the Chesapeake Bay and left with a teenaged Powhatan boy, Paquiquineo, whom they hoped would facilitate their future relationships with the people of the Chesapeake. After travel to Spain and Mexico, Paquiquineo finally

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returned a decade later to help establish a mission with a group of Jesuit friars. Instead, he led a group that killed the Jesuits.66

When they arrived over forty years later, the English noted that the Powhatans retained a hatred for the Spanish. Their experience, however had taught them something quite different from what the people of Guiana had learned. The Powhatans recognized that resistance worked, because they had driven out the Spanish. Instead of being greeted by eager English-speaking natives, the English encountered hostile Chesapeake at Cape Henry.

Unlike the loosely-organized tribes of Guiana, the Powhatans were a confederation. The lack of interference from the Spanish had left the Powhatans to develop this confederation over the last decades of the sixteenth century. The English might have allied with the Monacans against them, but they were beyond the James River falls and difficult to contact. The English had better relations with groups on the fringe of the Powhatan chiefdom, notably the Potawomecks. Such groups wanted European goods and felt less threatened by the English settlement because of their distance from it. They also attempted to use a relationship with the English to obtain greater autonomy with the Powhatan Confederacy.67 Still, the situation in Virginia was very different than in Guiana. Groups there invited the English to come live among them and assist in community defense. In Virginia, the English got along best with those living at a remove.


Even though individuals traded with the English, worked for, and perhaps even liked some colonists, the Powhatan leaders did not want an alliance. The Powhatans had enemies but none more troublesome than the English, with whom they eventually fought a series of wars. The issue in Virginia grew worse over time, as more colonists arrived to exacerbate the situation. As Helen C. Rountree succinctly put it, “The Powhatans and the English were always at odds with one another about something.”

Initially, the English did receive some aid from the Powhatans. Their leader, also typically referred to as Powhatan, attempted to control the settlers by incorporating them into his society. For example, this probably explains the dramatic scene in which his daughter, Pocahontas, seemed to save the life of John Smith. Instead, the ceremony likely signified Smith’s figurative death and rebirth into Powhatan’s family. The Powhatans also traded with the English, and the groups exchanged people, often boys, to facilitate future negotiations. Thus, although Powhatan was suspicious of the English and their motives, in Jamestown’s earliest years, he decided they did not pose enough of a threat.

Virginia had a precarious existence until at least the 1620s, but several scholars identify John Rolfe’s experiments with tobacco, beginning in 1612, as a turning point. Rolfe’s work establishing tobacco plantations at Jamestown is typically mentioned and dismissed in a few sentences: “in 1612... a Virginia settler, John Rolfe, planted at Jamestown tobacco seeds that were smuggled from Venezuela. Rolfe’s experiment proved that Virginia’s soil and climate were ideal for this crop. Tobacco exploded in

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68 Ibid., 203.

69 Frederic W. Gleach, Powhatan’s World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures (Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).
Virginia, expanding from 2,300 pounds in 1615 to half a million pounds in the 1620.”70 L.H. Roper writes that Rolfe “successfully introduced tobacco cultivation at Jamestown” and thus “established the early template for Anglo-American colonial success: the acquisition of a landed estate fuelled by an exportable commodity and the formation of connections in the metropolis.”71

The credit to Rolfe for first experimenting with tobacco can be traced to a few different accounts of Virginia’s early years. Ralph Hamor’s A True Discourse of the Present Estate of Virginia told readers about both of the sources of Rolfe’s fame. After waxing about the potential profits tobacco might bring, Hamor adds, “I may not forget the gentleman, worthie of much commendations, which first tooke the pains to make trial thereof, his name Mr John Rolfe, Anno Domini 1612.”72 Hamor also provides a clue as to Rolfe’s motives: “partly for the love he hath a long time borne unto it, and partly to raise commodity to the adventurers.”73 For later observers, the success of tobacco perhaps made his motivation too obvious to be worth interrogating; of course he wanted to plant tobacco—it wound up making a lot of money and “saved” the colony. If we fully interrogate Rolfe’s decision to plant tobacco seeds from South America, we can understand colonial Virginians as part of a broader Atlantic World that connected them to Spanish colonists, indigenous cultivators, and European traders and consumers. The image of Rolfe planting those (supposedly) first tobacco seeds is used as

73 Ibid.
the start of a narrative about how colonial Virginia was able to thrive after years of struggle.

Tobacco was long present in the Chesapeake before any English colonists arrived. From their earliest visits to the Chesapeake, Europeans saw tobacco use, and regularly took part in it. A 1585 account of Virginia mentions tobacco, and De Bry’s engraving of the Village of Secotan, which accompanied Hariot’s account of Virginia, shows natives smoking. John Smith’s 1612 map of Virginia contains an image of Powhatan smoking a pipe, and accounts from the colony’s early years frequently mention tobacco. Gabriel Archer, in an account of late May 1607, writes that when they met the werowansqua Opossumquonouske, “we had our accustomed cates [food], tobacco, and welcome.”74 George Percy, describing the earliest days of the settlement, showed both an existing familiarity with tobacco and in interest in divergent local practices: “they gave us of their tobacco, which they took in a pipe of earth made artificially as our are, but far bigger, with the bowl fashioned together with a piece of fine copper.”75 No offer of tobacco had a clear meaning as well, and a group of English who encountered “10 or 12 savages” was offered “neither victuals nor tobacco.” Understanding what this refusal of hospitality, the English quickly left.76 Rather than being a European introduction, tobacco was a prominent feature of indigenous life present throughout the Chesapeake.

The English landed in Jamestown familiar with the plant from their experiences at home and abroad. Many were already dedicated smokers and even arrived with \( N. \text{ rustica} \)

74 *Jamestown Narratives*, 112. “‘Cates’ are provisions or victuals, often goods that were bought rather than produced oneself” *OED Online*.

75 *Jamestown Narratives*, 92.

acquired en route from Dominican Caribs. A familiarity with \textit{N. tabacum} induced William Strachey to assess what the earlier colonists overlooked. He wrote that Virginia tobacco “is not of the best kynd yt is but poore and weake and of a byting tast.”\textsuperscript{77} Indeed, \textit{N. rustica} was the tobacco native to the Chesapeake and most of eastern North America. The Roanoke colonists arrived just as tobacco was becoming more popular and did not mention the difference. By 1607, however, European smokers preferred “Spanish tobacco.” Despite the colonists’ preference for \textit{N. tabacum}, scores of pipes left behind in Jamestown before 1614 suggest that they made due with \textit{N. rustica}.

The English owed their preference for \textit{N. tabacum} to the Spanish Empire, but their own imperial endeavors informed other facets of consumption. In much of South America, indigenous groups smoked tobacco in cigars made by wrapping dried tobacco leaves up in one large leaf. Cigars became the preferred mode of consumption in Iberia, too. Pipes were the dominant means of smoking tobacco along North America’s east coast. A 1573 text describes “the taking-in of the smoke of the Indian herbe called ‘Tobaco’ by an instrument formed like a little ladell.”\textsuperscript{78} When the first group of English colonists came to Roanoke, they adopted pipes in the manner of the Roanoke Indians. According to the botanist Charles l’Ecluse, when they returned to England they:

\begin{quote}
    brought with them similar pipes for taking tobacco smoke. Thereupon the use of tobacco spread even throughout the whole of England, especially among the courtiers with the result that they saw to the manufacture of many similar pipes for the inhalation of tobacco smoke.\textsuperscript{79}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{77} William Strachey, \textit{The Historie of travaile into Virginia Britannia} (London, 1612), 123-4.

\textsuperscript{78} William Harrison, “Great Chronologie” (1593), as quoted in Adrian Oswald, \textit{Clay Pipes for the Archaeologist}, British Archaeological Reports 14 (1975), 3. This entry was recorded for the year 1573.


The English at Jamestown arrived with influences derived from both the Spanish and the Roanoke tribes. Pipes continued to be so thoroughly dominant that an English traveler to Costa Rica in 1735 had to describe just what “seegars” were for his reader. Although the Powhatan belonged to a different group, they shared much with their Eastern Algonquian southern neighbors, including pipes.

For the first several years, the English colonists planted little and did not grow tobacco. In the early years, the settlers were neither concerned with nor ready to produce agricultural goods for export. Even if they had, they would have needed to procure *N. tabacum* to sell their crop in Europe. Rolfe did not introduce tobacco cultivation to the Chesapeake; rather, he introduced *N. tabacum* cultivation.

For a long time, scholars credited Trinidad or Venezuela as the source of Rolfe’s seeds. William Strachey, writing in 1612, listed the various crops Virginians were experimenting with and noted they had “tobacco-seeds from Trinidado.” Although Trinidad and coastal Venezuela accounted for just a part of the tobacco sold in England, it came to be considered the best. “Trinidado” was a seventeenth-century synonym for tobacco. Decades after Virginia produced the best tobacco, descriptions of specifically

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80 John Smith, *Complete Works*, I: 223; II: 162. Cotton was thus among the settlement’s first craftsmen.

81 John Cockburn, *A journey over land from the Gulf of Honduras to the great South-Sea* (London, 1735).

mentioned that it was as good as that from Trinidad.\textsuperscript{83} Such assertions in earlier accounts may have inspired reports that Rolfe’s seeds also came reportedly from such places.

More recently, historians have suggested that Rolfe brought his tobacco seeds from Bermuda, from which he departed for Jamestown.\textsuperscript{84} Rolfe was a member of the Third Supply, and left for Virginia in 1609 on Christopher Newport’s \textit{Sea Venture}. The Third Supply was intended to provide Virginia with men of more varied and useful backgrounds and deliver necessary goods for the settlers. The fleet was caught in a storm, and though most of the ships made their way to Virginia, the passengers of the \textit{Sea Venture} spent three days battling the storm and bailing out their ship before wrecking on Bermuda.

European sailors had known of Bermuda since Spanish sailor Juan Bermudez discovered it in 1503. It is an isolated, uninhabited Atlantic island 665 miles away from the coast of North Carolina. Over the next century, Spanish ships sometimes stopped there and occasionally left provisions behind. When Diego Ramirez landed in 1603, he noted tobacco growing on the island, and \textit{Sea Venture} passengers also observed wild hogs. Unsurprisingly, Bermuda’s abundance and Virginia’s rough start led some of the shipwreck survivors to prefer it. It was likely during his stay on the island that Rolfe procured \textit{N. tabacum} seeds. The group spent ten months on the island, building new ships that they sailed to Virginia in May 1610.\textsuperscript{85} Archaeological excavations at Jamestown

\textsuperscript{83} Berthold Laufer, “Introduction of Tobacco into Europe” \textit{Anthropology Leaflet No. 19} (Chicago: Field Museum, 1924), 1-66.

\textsuperscript{84} Kupperman, \textit{Jamestown Project}, 279-80. I am also indebted to conversations I had with Dave Givens at Jamestown Rediscovery for his insights into tobacco on Bermuda.

\textsuperscript{85} Jarvis, \textit{In the Eye of All Trade Bermuda}, especially Chapter One.
have uncovered pipes made on Bermuda brought by the *Sea Venture*. Might they have also had seeds or plants in tow?

Rolfe perhaps grew a crop of tobacco the next year, sending his first exports to London in 1612. The mere transplantation of *N. tabacum* was insufficient, because the colonists also required assistance in learning to grow and cure tobacco. Rolfe himself wrote in 1616 that Virginia tobacco indeed showed great promise but needed “a little more trial, and experience in the curing thereof,” after which it would “compare with the best in the *West Indies*.”\(^{86}\) In their quest to grow tobacco better, Virginians consciously modeled themselves after cultivators of all ethnicities from the Spanish Empire. Ralph Hamor defended Virginia’s fledgling tobacco industry by claiming it was as good as any from “west-Indie Trinidad or Cracus [Caracas].”\(^{87}\) Virginia Company records likewise refer to “the fffarming of the Spanish tobacco.”\(^{88}\) A 1620 treatise suggested that cultivators were still learning to imitate the Spanish: “there is some as good Tobacco brought from *Virginia* and the *Summer Islands*, as the first Tobaccos were that we had out of *Spaine*. And no doubt, but as they [the Spanish] discovering further into the Land, found better grounds for Tobacco: so will our people doe also as they goe further.”\(^{89}\) Virginia still had a lot to learn about “Spanish tobacco.”

John Rolfe named his farm and his tobacco “Varina” after a Venezuelan town, Barinas, and Virginians named another strain “Orinoco” after the Venezuelan River


\(^{89}\) Edward Bennett, *A Treatise devided into three parts, touching the inconveniences, that the Importation of Tobacco out of Spaine, hath brought into this Land* (London, 1620).
where the English illicitly traded. Such branding by Virginia cultivators was novel and innovative. Yet the brand names were imitative, too. Rather than staking out Virginia’s product as distinctive, planters claimed it was like Spanish-grown tobacco. This allure persisted long after Virginians dominated the market in London. In 1682, an account of Carolina stated “Tobacco grows very well; and they have of an excellent sort, mistaken by some of our English Smokers for Spanish Tobacco, and valued from 5 to 8s. the Pound; but finding a great deal of trouble in the Planting and Cure of it, and the great Quantities which Virginia, and other of His Majesties Plantations make, rendring it a Drug over all Europe; they do not much regard or encourage its Planting.”\footnote{T. A., Carolina, or, A description of the present state of that country and the natural excellencies thereof (London, 1682), 15-16.} Even though Virginia produced enough to discourage Carolinians, the real consumer standard remained Spanish tobacco.

Contemporaries were aware that tobacco was an indigenous plant, and that in consuming and growing it the English were following both Indians and Spanish customs. Critics of tobacco argued that in adopting the habit, the English were imitating heathen savages. In \textit{A Counterblaste to Tobacco}, James I asked how far tobacco users might go in following indigenous customs:

\begin{quote}
shall we, I say, without blushing, abase our selves so farre, as to imitate these beastly Indians, slaves to the Spaniards, refuse to the world, and as yet aliens from the holy Covenant of God? Why doe we not as well imitate them in walking naked as they doe? in preferring glasses, feathers, and such toyes, to golde and precious stones, as they do? yea why do we not denie God and adore the Devill, as they doe?\footnote{James I, \textit{A Counterblaste to Tobacco} (London, 1604).}
\end{quote}

In adopting tobacco, James suggested, the English were acting like Indians, not the Spanish. Because the Spanish did not consume nearly as much tobacco as the
English, smoking did not conform to their model.

Those who were knowledgeable of cultivation methods and favorable to tobacco argued just the opposite: English cultivators should adopt indigenous practices and avoid Spanish innovations, which tainted the natural product. The author of An Advice How to Plant Tobacco in England spoke out against England's illicit trade off the coast of Venezuela, as it had helped keep the Spanish colony afloat. Worse still, the author warned, the Spanish tainted their tobacco to disguise its defects. The author, writing in 1615, also warns against tobacco from Virginia and Bermuda. They have not learned how to properly prune the leaves, and may even “imitate the Spanish in juicing it.”

The English did indeed adopt indigenous practices. As the colonizers lived longer among them, they learned even more about tobacco agriculture. Although the plant itself came from the south, Virginians had to do more than merely plant it. Tobacco is a fickle plant requiring careful attention. Aspects of its cultivation among the Powhatan facilitated English education. In Virginia, planters probably grew tobacco in a separate plot, rather than using intertillage, which looked messy to Europeans. Unlike other crops, which women mostly grew, men cultivated tobacco. This fact made tobacco agriculture more familiar to the English and likely also caused them to pay more attention to it. While the English had more contact with indigenous women than previously recognized, seventeenth-century chroniclers typically failed to document much about their lives. As Helen C. Rountree notes, “English observers learned little about

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93 Rountree, Powhatan Indians of Virginia, 47.
94 Recent archaeological finds at Jamestown have revealed that indigenous women frequented the fort, a
Powhatan uses for wild plants,” a body of knowledge maintained by women. A final reason that made tobacco use more prominent to the English was that the Powhatan integrated it into their political ceremonies. Only those eligible to participate, married men, used tobacco. Since the English encountered the Powhatan as a foreign nation, they, too, they regularly welcomed them with tobacco. These factors would have facilitated the English learning more about tobacco from the Powhatan.

Growers had to cure tobacco to ship it across the Atlantic, because fresh leaves would rot. For many medicinal uses, fresh leaves were required, but smoking also requires dried leaves. Not all indigenous groups cured tobacco, but the Powhatans did. Strachey recorded that they “dry the leaves… over the fire and sometimes in the sun, and crumble it into powder—stalks, leaves, and all.” The English had to adopt further innovations to the process to match European expectations, but living among a group who already practiced rudimentary curing helped. Works on tobacco before 1615 that discuss cultivation do not explain how it might be cured. The English who arrived in Virginia likely needed instruction in this task.

Colonists also adopted other indigenous cultivation techniques. The Powhatans cleared new land by girding trees, which killed them, and then burning the underbrush. They then grew crops among the stumps and dead trees. The English adopted this method

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95 Rountree, *Powhatan Indians of Virginia*, 44. Although women were the primary plant foragers, men collected medicinal plants.

96 The colonists eventually would adopt air curing, but they would have done well to continue fire-curing as the Powhatans did, since it preserves the leaf better. Fire curing made a comeback in the nineteenth century.
to save themselves the time of cutting down trees and clearing the stumps. The colonists also initially planted their tobacco in hills.

John Rolfe’s marriage to Pocahontas in 1614 raises the question of how this particular Anglo-indigenous alliance assisted tobacco cultivation. In her biography of Pocahontas, Camilla Townsend posits that the Rolfe family would have had servants, and that many of them would have been Indians. Might these Indian servants have known about tobacco cultivation and shared their knowledge with Rolfe? Whether Pocahontas, her relatives, or other native tutors instructed Rolfe, he was indebted to the Powhatans and other indigenous tobacco growers and to cultivators from the Spanish Empire of all ethnicities. His decision to grow tobacco, cast as innovative, was in fact a safe plan modeled upon previous efforts. Rolfe, his fellow colonists, the Virginia Company, and investors were all aware of tobacco’s marketability in Europe and its suitability to Virginia’s environment. Rolfe’s actions might be cast as the start of one story, but it was also a continuation of many other narratives: European colonization in the Americas; agricultural developments in Powhatan; and a rising European interest in tobacco.

Virginia’s settlers readily took to tobacco. Rolfe sent a small amount to England in 1612 and four barrels in 1614. In 1617, John Smith noted that in Virginia one would find “the market-place, and streets, and all other spare places planted with Tobacco.” That year, Virginia farmers shipped 20,000 pounds. The best of it sold for three

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shillings a pound, far less than the eighteen Spanish tobacco fetched, but more valuable than anything else Virginia produced.¹⁰⁰

Unlike in other Northern European colonies, like St. Christopher, New Netherland, and the Guianas, where colonists readily accepted tobacco as a viable undertaking, leaders in Virginia hotly contested its cultivation. Virginia Company investors insisted on finding a lucrative export and experimented with new ways to develop the colony after a decade without profits. The need for greater earnings, a distaste for tobacco by some, and a general belief that Virginia must have more to offer than smoke led to a decades-long effort to convince planters to grow something else.

The above-quoted pamphlet by James I established the monarchy’s view of tobacco, a position adopted by his heirs and which provided a basis for other anti-tobacco arguments. The influential treasurer of the Virginia Company, Edwin Sandys, repeatedly encouraged the people to devote themselves to “Staple Commodities, as Corne, Wine, Silke, Silke-grasse, Hempe, Flax, Pitch and Tar, Pot-ashes and Sope-ashes, Iron, Clapboard, and other Materialls: and not wholly or chiefly about Tobacco, and Sassaphras.”¹⁰¹ The Company insisted that the colony held the riches Hakluyt and other suspected were there years before. It was the fault of the colonists for not yet discovering them.

This disdain for tobacco has been cast as forward-thinking. Tobacco is as bad as James I alleged; monoculture is unwise; Virginian planters suffered when gluts in the market made their crop nearly worthless. Yet, the alternatives proposed were often no


less foolish than the ones they attempted to uproot. A 1622 treatise by John Bonoeil is an illustrative example. In it, he argues that Virginians should turn to sericulture and wine-making. Although Bonoeil had never been to Virginia, he reckoned that it could produce better wine than “Languedock.” He thought the colonists would be “richly recompenced with ample profit” if they “constantly pursue those two most invaluable commodities of Silkes and Wines, which you may with ease and little cost bring speedily to perfection.”

Sericulture was widely promoted—the Virginia Company also declared that the “Countrey is exceeding proper, having innumerable store of Mulbery Trees of the best, and some Silke-wormes naturally found upon them, producing excellent Silke.”

James I sent his own silk worms to help the effort but, it never had much success in the colony. Few Virginia colonists possessed the skills required to make silk, and the native mulberry trees men like Bonoeil found so promising were less appealing to actual silkworms. The Virginia Company also invested in wine production and sent for both “divers skilfull Vignerons” along with “Vine Plants of the best sort.” Wine was ultimately more successful, but Virginia vintages do not, even today, tend to draw comparison with that made in Languedoc. As explained above, Virginia was also imagined to provide a water route to Asia.

As these examples show, Virginia’s investors, promoters, and leaders did not take tobacco seriously but lobbied for other paths to prosperity. It was only after many years

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103 *Declaration of the State of the Colony and Affaires in Virginia.*


105 There was wine production in colonial Virginia but most of it was made for private consumption.
that they finally accepted Virginia would be a tobacco colony. In struggling to accept that tobacco might be the best they would offer, Virginians acted out a drama also played in the Guianas, where the search for great treasures failed as the cultivation of an indigenous plant succeeded. The story of tobacco’s adoption, and the arguments over its place in the colony, show connections with Spanish and South American colonies and with Powhatan cultivators. It reveals the fears of some English that adoption of tobacco cultivation and consumption was the wrong direction for the empire to be taking, one that rejected the admirable aspects of the Spanish example and instead imitated the practices of heathen Indians.

The rise of tobacco in Virginia coincided with several other developments that ensured Virginia’s permanence. In 1619, leadership of the Company passed to Sir Edwin Sandys, who hoped to stabilize the colony by stimulating a wave of migration. To do it, the Company stipulated that new immigrants who paid their own or someone else’s passage would be rewarded with fifty acres per head. Settlers already in the colony would likewise be compensated with even larger grants of land.106

This move to give the settlers greater control was a sharp contrast to the colony’s early years, marked by martial law. The creation of the Virginia Assembly in 1619 further aided this process. Stability also came in the form of women colonists. The Company hoped that by encouraging settlers to marry and have families, they would be “more setled & lesse moveable.”107 This period also saw the arrival of a ship carrying

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“20. and odd Negroes,” who were, if not the first Africans in Virginia, among the first.\textsuperscript{108}

For the next several decades, Africans worked alongside indentured servants. Only towards the end of the century would slavery become the preferred labor regime in Virginia and synonymous with African labor.

By 1700, tobacco was the undisputed Virginian crop. Although the Company continued to insist its settlers diversify the economy, they also lobbied for a prohibition on tobacco cultivation in England, which the king granted in 1622. From then on, consumers preferred tobacco from Virginia and Bermuda, and the monarch received one-third of the profits.

Both the arrival of new people and the rise of tobacco production meant disaster for the relationship with Powhatans. On March 22, 1622, several Powhatans who had been invited to breakfast in different English homes mounted a coordinated attack. They reportedly killed 347 people, about a third of the settlers, and likely killed more.\textsuperscript{109} The Company encouraged the colonists to wage perpetual war, but this directive, along with widespread news of the attack itself, discouraged immigration. Partly due to the fallout, the Virginia Company was dissolved and the colony reverted to royal control in May 1624. In the 1630s, English immigration to Virginia rose again, and so many came that settlers finally overwhelmed the Powhatans.

\textsuperscript{108} Historians previously thought they were the first Africans and Virginia but a census from early 1620 records thirty-two Africans, which suggests there were others already there. For more on them see: Engel Sluiter, “New Light on the ‘20. and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia, August 1619,” \textit{The William and Mary Quarterly} 54, no. 2 (1997); John Thornton, “The African Experience of the ‘20. and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia in 1619,” \textit{The William and Mary Quarterly} 55, no. 3 (1998).

\textsuperscript{109} Most settlers still died of other causes. From 1619 to 1621, 4,270 migrants made the journey but only 1,240 colonists survived at the time of the attack. Kupperman, \textit{Jamestown Project}, 310.
Conclusion

In the decades that followed the settlement of the Upstart Empires’ permanent colonies, both the Atlantic World and tobacco cultivation were transformed. The Dutch, English, and French all became more heavily involved in the Americas, founding new colonies and establishing trade routes that connected Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Although the Iberian Empires were still formidable, Northern Europeans were powerful challengers. The Spanish could no longer nurture plans of keeping the New World to themselves.

Over the course of the seventeenth century, tobacco prices fluctuated. Some settlers and investors grew rich from it, but more failed to do so. Tobacco cultivation started to disappear from places where indigenous peoples and Europeans alike had cultivated it in favor of other crops, even as it was grown in great quantities in the Chesapeake. Large-scale tobacco cultivation was especially unsuitable for small Caribbean islands. During the so-called sugar revolution of the mid-seventeenth century, tobacco, which quickly exhausts soil, was replaced with the more lucrative crop. As prices stabilized, tobacco also mostly disappeared from more northern colonies, though not entirely. In places where tobacco was still a major crop, its cultivation had been radically altered. In Virginia, most aspects of tobacco agriculture were mandated by law. State and local governments dictated every aspect of cultivation and trade, including the amount of leaves a farmer could allow per plant, how many plants were permitted per acre, and the manner in which it was packaged. By the end of the seventeenth century, enslaved Africans did much of this work.
This dissertation has attempted to demonstrate the consequences of the Upstart Empires’ early experience trading and growing tobacco in the Caribbean and in South America for their later success. The success of the Upstart Empires and the many changes made to tobacco agriculture as it became a global commodity both obscured this. This dissertation has argued that we need to connect northern European empires—the English, French, and Dutch—with their Iberian antecedents. Northern Europeans developed ideas about the Americas based on the Spanish empire. Although their own American empires would come to develop quite differently, in their earliest forays across the Atlantic, Northern Europeans held out hope of finding their own Potosí or Tenochtitlan. Even when their ships came to obtain goods rather than settle or explore, they relied upon the Spanish. Although piracy was an important part of what the Upstarts were doing in the Caribbean and Atlantic, they also often conducted peaceful trade. The early seventeenth century tobacco trade detailed in Chapter Three is an example of how the Upstarts and Spanish settlers relied upon one another. When the Upstarts started to settle in the Guianas, their acceptance by its native peoples was made possible by a century of Spanish intrusion into the area. Indigenous groups in Guiana found the Upstarts to be useful allies against the Spanish. Even in Virginia, the English traveled in the Spaniards’ wake. The Powhatan had their own history with the Spanish and it shaped how they initially received the English.

When we consider Northern European empires, we should also look at their longer history rather than starting with their first permanent colonies. The Upstart Empires’ engagement with the Americas began long before. Even once such colonies were settled, it usually took years before they were stable. In the meantime, they
competed with other colonies that turned out to be shorter lived. Throughout this dissertation, I have highlighted the overlap between piracy, illicit trade, and short-lived settlements with permanent colonies. These activities often involved the same people, and the lessons learned in one arena of activity were applied to others.

Tobacco linked these things together and its cultivation required skill. The story of the origins of northern European empires is the story of the transmission of tobacco and the knowledge required to cultivate it. Spanish colonists on the margins of empire were the first Europeans to grow it for trade, and they learned how to do so from local indigenous peoples. Africans in the Americas were another group of early adopters. Northern Europeans sought the advice and labor of these groups as they started growing it themselves.

The methodological approach of this dissertation has been to rely on sources from a variety of archives to tell this story. The organization of imperial archives has obscured the degree to which the Upstarts, Iberians, Africans, and Natives interacted, relied upon, and even aided one another. It has led in particular to an erasure of the South American roots of North American colonies. Sources for the early seventeenth century are scarce, but by using diverse archives, a fuller picture comes into view.

But the story told in this dissertation was not merely obscured by chance. It was also purposely erased. As part of their nineteenth century empire building, the United States aggressively defended their right to seize native land based on the notion that indigenous people did not properly use it. This justification had been around at least since the 1516 publication of Thomas More’s *Utopia*, which declared that “when any people holdeth a piece of ground void and vacant to no good or profitable use: keeping others
Early colonists sometimes cited this to justify dispossession, but just as often they revealed the extent and sophistication of indigenous agriculture. A 1636 map of Virginia tells one such story. In it, Algonquian men shoot the free-roaming English hogs that they destroyed their crops. The Powhatan hunted, but they were also agriculturalists.

Figure 26: 1636 Map of Virginia. The men shooting hogs are to the right.

By the time Andrew Jackson rose to the presidency, many Americans wanted indigenous dispossession no matter the justification. In their eagerness to take native

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land, they removed many tribes that had in fact adopted European agriculture and dress, developed literacy, and even introduced slavery. By the twentieth century, many Americans no longer lived near large groups of indigenous people, so it became somewhat easier to craft a narrative claiming, as Theodore Roosevelt did, that they were all nomadic hunters and North America prior to the arrival of Europeans had been “nothing but a game preserve for squalid savages.” All of this, of course, obscured the debt European settlers owed to native agriculture. Without it, it is hard to imagine how any colony would have survived, let alone prospered. This is especially true for Virginia, where the colonists nearly starved to death even with aid.

Crafting an American identity also often involved erasing the influence of the Spanish. As with dispossession, the tactics deployed to do so had their roots in Early Modern Europe. Northern Europeans emphasized the Black Legend, even as they borrowed ideas and methods from the Spanish Empire. Their own empires were certainly no kinder to those they subdued. Religious conflict helped build a narrative that pitted backward, superstitious Catholicism against rational, enlightened Protestantism.

The United States developed a national identity that was defined (at least in part) against Latin America. Its closest neighbor paid the heaviest toll for this antagonistic stance when the U.S. seized half of Mexico’s land in the 1850s, an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to alleviate its own sectional tensions. In the twentieth century, a belief that Latin Americans were incapable of properly governing themselves led to U.S. intervention in their governments and elections.

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U.S. history played a role, too. Virginia and Massachusetts have taken turns in the role of founding colony, but both narratives place emphasis on the future U.S. being settled by English Protestants. This North American eastern seaboard perspective proved overwhelmingly persuasive. Even terrible aspects of U.S. history, like the transatlantic slave trade, that might have been plausibly blamed on Spanish precedents were instead examined only in the context of the Chesapeake.

In our own time, politicians and hate groups have espoused an American identity premised upon whiteness, negating the influence of Latin America, African Americans, and indigenous people upon its history. A cursory study of any period of United States history would serve to show how errant this view is, but the task of my own work has been to argue for the crucial influence of all of these groups in the earliest experiences of Northern European colonizers.
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