

The Rise of England, the Decline of Spain, and the birth of the "First" British Empire.¹

- Catholic Spain dominated the world during the 16th century (1500s).
- Following Columbus, the Spanish built a massive empire in Central/South America based on exploitation of resources (mainly gold & silver).
- Trying to establish their own empires, northern European monarchies sent expeditions into "North America." The French began their own search for a "Northwest Passage" to China. By 1504 French fishermen appeared off the coast of Newfoundland. Jacques Cartier led three voyages down the St. Lawrence during the 1530s.
- Zuan Caboto (John Cabot) explores the Newfoundland coast for England's King Henry VII in 1497, laying the foundations for the "First British Empire."

Meanwhile . . .

- Spain reached its zenith of power under the reign of King Phillip II. Obsessed with Catholic unity (remember our discussion about the Reformation period and the fragmentation of the Christian Church in Europe), Phillip II began a series of efforts to reestablish Roman Catholicism as the sole church of Europe.
- Phillip II married England's Queen Mary I – ushering in a Catholic revival in England (undoing all the Protestant gains under Mary's half-brother Edward IV). Mary I dies childless and her half-sister Elizabeth (a Protestant) ascends the throne as Queen Elizabeth I.



- At this point England was a nation in decline – bankrupt, with an inadequate navy and little army.
- Phillip II proposed marriage with Elizabeth I (which was flatly refused). Elizabeth meant to rule England alone and reestablish the Church of England (a Protestant church).
- Puritans (Protestants that rejected the Church of England's appearance of a Roman Catholic Church – only without the pope) challenged Elizabeth I's vision for an English Church.

¹ Updated on October 16th, 2016

- Elizabeth I authorized privateers (i.e. pirates John Hawkins, Humphrey Gilbert and Walter Raleigh) to raid and pillage Spanish ships, settlements and the slave-trade in the New World – depleting the flow of resources back to Spain. This is the birth of the British Royal Navy.
 - Sir Humphrey Gilbert claims the St. John's harbour for Queen Elizabeth I in 1583, but leaves no settlers.
 - Sir Walter Raleigh founds an ill-fated settlement at Roanoke Island in North Carolina.
- Phillip II directly challenged Elizabeth I, calling her a “heretic queen.” In 1588 the Spanish Armada (fleet) was sent to England to invade and overthrow Elizabeth I. The English – commanded by John Hawkins, Francis Drake and Martin Frobisher – scattered the Spanish Armada by sending blazing fire ships into its midst. A great gale then blew the Spanish into Scottish waters – a divesting “blow.” The Spanish never recovered from this defeat, and thus began the decline of Spain.
- The reign of Elizabeth I saw the emergence of Protestant England as a world power. The Queen rebuilt the navy, and began asserting English claims in the New World.
- Elizabeth I sent Martin Frobisher on a series of expeditions to the high Arctic of North America in search of a Northwest Passage to China.
 - First voyage returned with samples of ore he believed contained gold, causing Frobisher to found the Company of Cathay.
 - During his second voyage, Frobisher landed on modern-day Baffin Island, claiming it in the name of the Queen.
 - Frobisher’s third voyage ended in financial ruin as the “gold” he mined out of the Arctic turned out to be worthless. All attempts to colonize ended in failure. Still, the explorer had sparked an interest in his Queen to establish a vast northern empire in the continent.
- Elizabeth I's successor, King James I (1603-1625), continued a change in approach to colonization. According to *Traditions & Encounters* (McGraw Hill, 2006) "private investors played larger roles in English and French colonial efforts. Individuals put up the money to finance expeditions to America, and they reunited much more control over their colonies' affairs . . . Although English colonies were always subject to royal authority . . . they also maintained their own assemblies and influenced the choice of governors.



Under James I, England and Scotland are united under one monarch. The Union Jack is created to symbolize this Royal Union.

- British East India Company is founded by Royal Charter from Queen Elizabeth I in 1600.
- The Virginia Company of London founds the first permanent English-speaking settlement at Jamestown, Virginia colony, in 1604. The company's charter is revoked, and Crown rule comes in 1624.
 - The region of "New England" is largely settled by Pilgrims heavily influenced by Puritanical beliefs. The story of Plymouth Rock (Mayflower) reflects this.
- Society of Merchant Venturers (a private entrepreneurial and charitable organisation in the English city of Bristol) established a permanent settlement at Cuper's Cove, Newfoundland, in 1610.
- St. George's, Bermuda was founded by the Virginia Company, in 1612.
- Maryland was founded as a haven for Roman Catholics (1634).
- In 1664, the British takeover the Dutch colony of New Netherlands, renaming it as the Province of New York. The British also acquired New Sweden, which they renamed Delaware.
- King Charles II incorporates by royal charter the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), granting it a monopoly on the fur trade in the area known as Rupert's Land in 1670.
- In 1672 the Royal African Company is inaugurated, receiving from King Charles II a monopoly of the trade to supply slaves to the British colonies of the Caribbean. From the outset, slavery was the basis of the British Empire in the West Indies.

