

government

The formal vehicle through which policies are made and affairs of state are conducted.

In 1492, Christopher Columbus, with the support of the king and queen of Spain, landed in the Bahamas in the “New World” on his journey to find a quicker water route to India and its riches. Believing he had landed in India, he named the native peoples Indians. After the news of Columbus’s expedition, other explorers sponsored by Spain, such as Hernando de Soto and Juan Ponce de Leon, traveled west looking for gold, furs, and rich soil. Adventurers such as John Cabot and Sir Frances Drake from England and Giovanni da Verrazano, an Italian sponsored by France, soon launched their own expeditions.

These explorers were not interested in establishing permanent residences. The monarchies supporting them wanted to claim native lands for themselves. Spain, France, and England more than welcomed the gold, furs, and new agricultural riches, which greatly enlarged their national treasuries.

As nations began to compete for lands, Pope Alexander VI, who claimed all lands for God and thus the Roman Catholic Church, issued a proclamation in 1494 that drew a north/south line through the Western Hemisphere, giving the west to Spain and the east to Portugal. Spain occupied settlements in Florida and eventually the entire Southwest and what later became known as the Louisiana Purchase.

By the mid-1500s, France, Holland, and Great Britain were engaged in exploring North America. French fur trappers moved throughout what is now the eastern parts of Canada and established a settlement in Quebec. To facilitate trade, trappers knew that they must establish good working relationships with several Indian tribes. In sharp contrast, the Spanish enslaved American Indians and treated them with brutality. It wasn’t to be too long before France, Holland, and Great Britain recognized the potential offered by the New World and sought to seek land previously claimed by Spain.

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In this text, we explore the American political system through a historical lens. This perspective allows us to analyze the ways that the ideas and actions of a host of different Americans—from European explorers, to Indians, to colonists, to the Framers of the Constitution as well as the global citizens of today—have affected how our **government**—the formal vehicle through which policies are made and affairs of state are conducted—works.

ROOTS OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT: WE THE PEOPLE

1.1 Trace the origins of American government.

Much has changed since the earliest explorers and settlers came to the New World. The people who live in America today differ greatly from those early inhabitants. In this section, we lay the groundwork for the study of the United States today by looking at the earliest inhabitants of the Americas, their initial and ongoing interactions with European colonists, and how new Americans continually built on the experiences of the past to create a new future.

The Earliest Inhabitants of the Americas

By the time the first colonists arrived in what is now known as the United States, indigenous peoples had been living in the area for more than 30,000 years. Most historians and archaeologists believe that these peoples migrated from present-day Russia through the Bering Strait into North America and then dispersed throughout the American continents. Some debate continues, however, about where they first appeared and whether they crossed an ice bridge from Siberia or arrived on boats from across the Pacific. Other peoples came from the Southern Hemisphere and settled in the Southwest.

FIGURE 1.1 WHAT DID TRIBAL DISTRIBUTION LOOK LIKE BEFORE EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT?

The first peoples of North America were extremely diverse, with hundreds of different cultures, languages, and traditions dispersed across North America before the arrival of European settlers.



The indigenous peoples were not a homogeneous group; their cultures, customs, and values varied widely, as did their political systems. The number of these indigenous peoples, who lived in all parts of what is now the United States, is impossible to know for certain. Estimates by scholars, however, range from 100 million people to many more. These numbers quickly diminished as colonists brought with them to the New World a range of diseases to which the indigenous peoples had not been exposed. In addition, warfare with the European settlers as well as within tribes not only killed many American Indians but also disrupted previously established ways of life. And, the European settlers displaced Indians, repeatedly pushing them westward as they created settlements and, later, colonies.

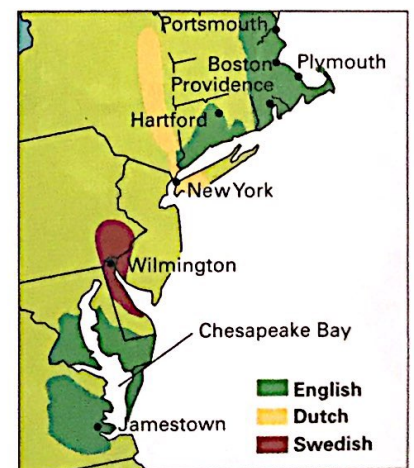
The First Colonists

Colonists journeyed to North America for a variety of reasons. Many wealthy Englishmen and other Europeans left home seeking to enhance their fortunes. With them came a host of laborers who hoped to find their own opportunities for riches. In fact, commerce was the most common initial reason for settlement in North America.

The first permanent English settlement was established in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607 by a joint stock company seeking riches in the New World. In 1619, the first slaves arrived there. In 1609, the Dutch New Netherland Company settled along the Hudson and lower Delaware Rivers, calling the area New Netherlands. Later, in 1626, the Dutch West India Company purchased Manhattan Island from an Indian tribe and established trading posts on the Hudson River. Both Fort Orange, in what is now Albany, New York, and New Amsterdam, New York City's Manhattan Island, were populated not by colonists but by salaried employees. Among those who flocked to New Amsterdam (renamed New York in 1664) were settlers from Finland, Germany, and Sweden. The varied immigrants also included free blacks. This ethnic and racial mix created its own system of cultural inclusiveness that continues to make New York City and its citizenry unique today (see Figure 1.2).

FIGURE 1.2 WHAT DID COLONIAL SETTLEMENT LOOK LIKE BEFORE 1700?

Prior to 1700, pockets of colonial settlement existed along the east coast of what became the United States, from present-day Virginia to what is now Maine. These settlements were divided among a number of colonial powers, including the English in the northeast and around the Chesapeake Bay, the Dutch in what is present-day New York, and the Swedes, largely in present-day Delaware.



Mayflower

The ship carrying Pilgrim settlers from England whose arrival in Massachusetts in 1620 is considered a founding moment for the nation.

Roger Williams

Seventeenth century religious and political leader who was expelled by Puritans in Massachusetts and then established the colony of Providence Plantations that later became Rhode Island.

Anne Hutchinson

Seventeenth century political leader and thinker who supported religious liberty.

Thomas Hooker

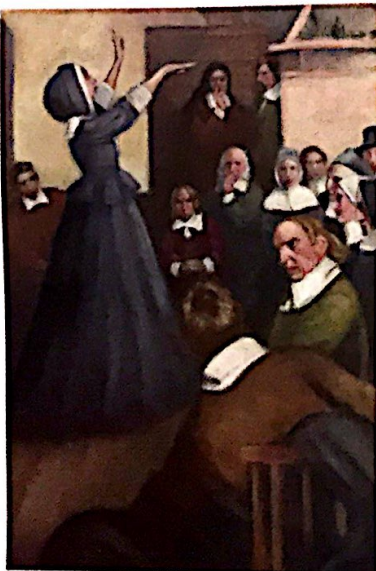
Colonial-era politician who supported expanded voting rights.

William Penn

Quaker leader and supporter of religious tolerance who founded Pennsylvania.

WHO WAS ANNE HUTCHINSON?

Anne Hutchinson was a midwife and minister who challenged the prevailing religious thinking of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. She was expelled from the colony and went on to found a new settlement at Portsmouth, Rhode Island, attracting many women to her views on Christianity.

**A Religious Tradition Takes Root**

In 1620, a group of Protestants known as Puritans left Europe aboard the *Mayflower*. Destined for Virginia, they found themselves off course and landed instead in Plymouth, in what is now Massachusetts. These new settlers differed from those in Virginia and New York, who saw their settlements as commercial ventures. Adhering to Calvinist religious beliefs, the Puritans (also called Pilgrims, a term used to describe religious travellers) came instead as families bound together by a common belief in the powerful role of religion in their lives. They believed the Old Testament charged them to create “a city on a hill” that would shine as an example of righteousness. To help achieve this goal, they enforced a strict code of authority and obedience, while simultaneously stressing the importance of individualism.

Soon, the ideas at the core of these strict puritanical values faced challenges. In 1631, **Roger Williams** arrived in Boston, Massachusetts. He preached extreme separation from the Church of England and even questioned the right of Europeans to settle on Indian lands. He believed that the Puritans went too far when they punished settlers who deviated from their strict code of morality, arguing that it was God, not people, who should punish individuals for their moral shortcomings. These “heretical views” prompted local magistrates to banish him from the colony in 1635. Williams then helped to establish the colony of Providence Plantations. Providence, now the capital of present-day Rhode Island, was named for “God’s merciful Providence,” which Williams believed had allowed his followers to find a place to settle.

A later challenge to the Puritans’ religious beliefs came from midwife **Anne Hutchinson**. She began to share her view that the churches established in Massachusetts had lost touch with the Holy Spirit. Many of her followers were women who were attracted to her progressive ideas on the importance of religious tolerance, as well as on the equality and rights of women. Authorities in Massachusetts tried Hutchinson for blasphemy for her views and banished her from the colony. She and her followers eventually settled in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, which became a beacon for those seeking religious toleration and popular—as opposed to religious—sovereignty.

Thomas Hooker, too, soon found himself at odds with the Calvinist Puritans in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Hooker believed they were too narrow-minded; in his view, all men should have the right to vote regardless of religious views or property qualifications. He and his supporters thus relocated to the new colony of Connecticut, where they developed a settlement at Hartford. Hooker’s words inspired the drafting of the Connecticut constitution, thought to be the first to establish a representative government.

Later colonies in the New World were established with religious tolerance in mind. In 1632, King Charles I granted a well-known English Catholic, George Calvert, the first Lord Baltimore, a charter to establish the Catholic colony of Maryland in the New World. In 1681, King Charles II bestowed upon **William Penn** a charter giving him sole ownership of a vast area of land just north of Maryland. The king called the land Pennsylvania, or Penn’s Woods. Penn, a Quaker, eventually also purchased the land that is present-day Delaware. In this area, Penn launched what he called “the holy experiment,” attracting other persecuted Europeans, including German Mennonites and Lutherans, and French Huguenots. The survival of Penn’s colony is largely attributable to its ethnic and religious diversity.

FUNCTIONS OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT**1.2 Explain the functions of American government.**

The people who settled in colonial America were a diverse lot. They were driven to settle in the New World for a variety of reasons, including religious freedom and economic gain. Thus, when the colonists declared independence from Great Britain in 1776, it was no easy task to devise a system of government that served all of these citizens’ interests.