

Maritime Empires Develop

All of the residents of these United Provinces [the Netherlands] shall be allowed to participate in [the Dutch East India] Company and to do so with as little or as great an amount of money as they choose.

—Charter, Dutch East India Company, 1602

Essential Question: What economic strategies did maritime empires use to increase their power, and how did the developing empires affect political, economic, religious, and cultural dynamics?

Maritime (sea-based) empires transformed commerce from local, small-scale trading, mostly based on barter, to large-scale international trade using gold and silver. These empires employed new economic models, such as joint-stock companies, through which investors financed trade by buying shares in corporations such as the East India Company, supporting increased trade in Asia. New ocean trade routes were opened, aiding the rise of this extended global economy. The Atlantic trading system involved the movement of labor—including slaves—and the mixing of African, American, and European cultures and peoples, with all groups contributing to a cultural synthesis. Silver, sugar, and slavery were the keys to the development of these mercantilist empires.

Economic Strategies

In the 17th century, Europeans generally measured the wealth of a country in how much gold and silver it had in its coffers. To achieve this wealth, countries used economic strategies designed to sell as many goods as they could to other countries in order to obtain maximum amounts of gold and silver. To keep their wealth, countries would also spend as little of their precious metals as possible on goods from other countries.

The accumulation of **capital**, material wealth available to produce more wealth, in Western Europe grew as entrepreneurs entered long-distance markets. Capital changed hands from entrepreneurs to laborers, putting laborers in a better position to become consumers—and even investors, as the above quote suggests. Despite restrictions by the Church, lending money at high rates of interest became commonplace. Actual wealth also increased with gold and silver from the Western Hemisphere.

Commercial Revolution

The transformation to a trade-based economy using gold and silver is known as the **Commercial Revolution**. The Commercial Revolution affected all regions of the world and resulted from four key factors: the development of European overseas colonies; the opening of new ocean trade routes; population growth; and inflation, caused partly by the pressure of the increasing population and partly by the increased amount of gold and silver that was mined and put in circulation. The high rate of inflation, or general rise in prices, in the 16th and early 17th century is called the **Price Revolution**.

Aiding the rise of this extended global economy was the formation of **joint-stock companies**, owned by investors who bought stock or shares in them. People invested capital in such companies and shared both the profits and the risks of exploration and trading ventures. Offering **limited liability**, the principle that an investor was not responsible for a company's debts or other liabilities beyond the amount of an investment, made investing safer.

The developing European middle class had capital to invest from successful businesses in their home countries. They also had money with which to purchase imported luxuries. The Dutch, English, and French all developed joint-stock companies in the 17th century, including the British **East India Company** in 1600 and the **Dutch East India Company** in 1602. In Spain and Portugal, however, the government did most of the investing itself through grants to certain explorers. Joint-stock companies were a driving force behind the development of maritime empires as they allowed continued exploration as well as ventures to colonize and develop the resources of distant lands with limited risk to investors.

Commerce and Finance The Dutch were long the commercial middlemen of Europe, having set up and maintained trade routes to Latin America, North America, South Africa, and Indonesia. Dutch ships were faster and lighter than those of their rivals for most of the 17th century, giving them an early trade advantage. The Dutch East India Company was also highly successful as a joint-stock company. It made enormous profits in the Spice Islands and Southeast Asia.



Source: Wikimedia Commons

The Dutch ship *Vryburg* on Chinese export porcelain, 1756

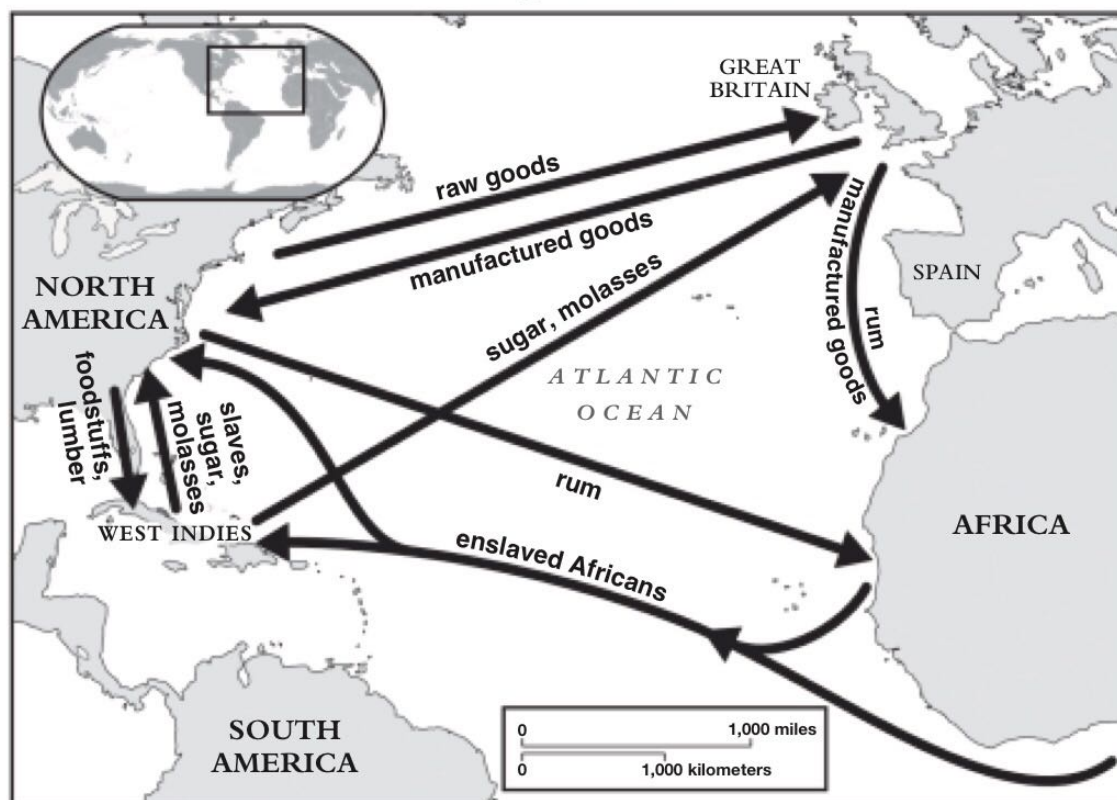


Pioneers in finance, the Dutch had a stock exchange as early as 1602. By 1609, the Bank of Amsterdam traded currency internationally. The Dutch standard of living was the highest in Europe as such goods as diamonds, linen, pottery, and tulip bulbs passed through the hands of Dutch traders.

France and England were not so fortunate. Early in the 18th century, both fell victim to speculative financial schemes. Known as financial bubbles, the schemes were based on the sale of shares to investors who were promised a certain return on their investment. After a frenzy of buying that drove up the price of shares, the bubble burst and investors lost huge amounts of money, sending many into bankruptcy and inflicting wide damage to the economy.

Triangular Trade The Europeans' desire for enslaved workers in the Americas coupled with Portugal's "discovery" of West Africa meant that Africa became the source for new labor. Enslaved Africans became part of a complex Atlantic trading system known as the **triangular trade**, because voyages often had three segments. A ship might carry European manufactured goods such as firearms to West Africa, and from there transport enslaved Africans to the Americas, and then load up with sugar or tobacco to take to Europe. Sugar was the most profitable good from the Americas. By the 1700s, Caribbean sugar production and rum (made from sugar) were financing fortunes in Britain, and to a lesser extent, in France and the Netherlands.

Triangular Trade



Rivalries for the Indian Ocean Trade

After Europeans stumbled on the Americas, trade over the Atlantic Ocean became significant. However, states continued to vie for control of trade routes on the Indian Ocean as well. The Portuguese soundly defeated a combined Muslim and Venetian force in a naval battle in the Arabian Sea in 1509 (see Topic 4.4) over controlling trade. They met a different fate, though, when they tried to conquer Moroccan forces in a battle on land in 1578.

Its coffers depleted after the victory, Morocco looked inland to capture the riches of the Songhai Kingdom, despite the prohibition of waging war on another Muslim state. With thousands of soldiers, camels, and horses, as well as eight cannons and other firearms, Moroccan forces traveled months to reach Songhai. In 1590, in a battle near Gao, the Songhai—despite their greater number of fighters—were overcome by the force of firearms. The empire crumbled. The Spanish and Portuguese soon overtook much of this territory.

Change and Continuities in Trade Networks

The trading networks involved a new global circulation of goods, wealth, and labor. Silver from the Spanish colonies in the Americas flowed to Asia, where Asians were eager to exchange their goods—silks, porcelain, steel products—for silver. Asian goods were eagerly purchased in the Atlantic markets.

New Monopolies One way these patterns of trade were maintained was through **monopolies** chartered by European rulers. Monopolies granted certain merchants—usually through a joint-stock company—or the government itself the exclusive right to trade. For example, the Spanish government established a monopoly first over all the domestic tobacco grown and then over all the tobacco grown in its American colonies. The profits from this monopoly greatly enriched the Spanish government. The income from tobacco in Spain made up about one-third of total revenues.

Ongoing Regional Markets At the same time, traditional regional markets continued to flourish in Afro-Eurasia. However, improved shipping offered merchants the opportunity to increase their volume of products. The increasing output of peasant and artisan labor—wool and linen from Western Europe, cotton from India, and silk from China—exchanged hands in port cities with global connections.

Effects of the Atlantic Slave Trade

The Atlantic slave trade greatly weakened several West African kingdoms, such as Kongo. The loss of so many people slowed population growth. Trade competition led to violence among their societies, but also made African slave-raiding kingdoms economically dependent on goods from Europe. Such societies were slow to develop more complex economies in which they produced their own goods. Thus, the slave trade set the stage for European conquest and imperialism of the late 19th century. (See Topic 6.2.)

Economically, African societies that conducted slave raids, such as the **Dahomey** and the **Oyo**, became richer from selling their captives to Europeans. This trade also had political effects, because when a society such as the Dahomey exchanged slaves for guns, its raiders easily took advantage of rival societies that had no firearms. Without firearms, neighboring groups could not fight off slave raids, so raiding societies became even richer and more fortified with firearms. Intergroup warfare thus became more common and bloodier as a result of the slave trade.

Slavery and Gender Those most affected by the slave trade were the peoples and civilizations of West Africa in present-day Ghana and Benin, from which most Africans were kidnapped or sold. Gender distributions in those regions became severely imbalanced, because more than two-thirds of those taken were males. The resulting predominance of women prompted a rise in **polygyny** (the taking of more than one wife) and forced women to assume duties that had traditionally been men's jobs.

Impact of New Foods While the Atlantic trading system weakened Africa in many ways, it also ultimately spurred population growth through an improved diet. The Columbian Exchange introduced new crops to the continent, such as the American crops maize, peanuts, and manioc (also known as yucca or cassava), which became staples in the African diet.

Political and Cultural Changes for Indigenous Peoples

Earlier land-based empires, such as those of the Romans, Muslims, and Mongols, all grappled with how to deal with conquered people's traditions and cultures. These empires either allowed traditions to exist or they tried to graft their ways onto those of their subjects. European empires in the Americas stood in stark contrast to these land-based empires. The Spanish and Portuguese empires managed to erase the basic social structures and many of the cultural traditions of the indigenous Americans within a century of when the first European explorers arrived. Europeans' actions nearly depopulated the Americas.

Political Changes: Colonial Administration Indigenous political structures in Latin America were soon replaced by Spanish and Portuguese colonial administrations. Spanish royalty appointed **viceroy**s to act as administrators and representatives of the Spanish crown. To keep these viceroys from operating independently of the crown, Spain established **audiencias**, or royal courts, to which Spanish settlers could appeal viceroys' decisions or policies. Slow transportation and communication networks between Europe and the Americas, however, made it difficult for the Spanish crown to exercise direct control over New Spain. As a result, the Spanish throne did not focus on colonial affairs in the Western Hemisphere.

Cultural Changes The indigenous peoples of the Americas lost a great deal of their culture and history at the hands of conquerors. Conquistadors, such as Cortés in Mexico, ordered the burning of native books, which were

thought to be unholy. Thus, very few original accounts written in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztec, exist today.

The scarcity of firsthand accounts from indigenous peoples has shaped how historians view this period. For example, because the Spanish burned nearly all Aztec documents, most of the information about the Aztec comes from documents that were written by Spanish conquistadores and priests after the conquest. The authors' biases and lack of familiarity with Nahuatl limits the value of these sources. However, some sources are considered reliable. For example, in 1545, a Spanish priest named Bernardino de Sahagún began compiling the Florentine Codex, one of the most widely cited sources about Aztec life before conquest. (A codex is a type of book.)

Spanish and Portuguese conquerors transplanted their own languages and religion into the Americas. The remnants of this cultural interaction are present today. Although indigenous languages thrive in certain regions—in Guatemala and in the mountains of Mexico, for example—Spanish predominates through much of Latin America, and Brazilians overwhelmingly speak Portuguese.

By 1750, those born in America of Spanish origin, or **creoles**, enjoyed political dominance in New Spain. They soon began clamoring for independence from the Spanish throne. (Connect: Create a two-column chart comparing the influence of Spanish and Portuguese maritime empires on native populations from the 16th and 17th centuries. See Topics 4.4)

Effects of Belief Systems

The increase and intensity of newly established global connections between hemispheres extended the reach of existing religions. In some areas, the new connections contributed to the development of syncretic belief systems and practices. In other areas, the connections contributed to religious conflicts.

Syncretic Belief Systems in the Americas

African religions in the Americas provide powerful examples of religious **syncretism**, or the combining of different religious beliefs and practices. Africans melded aspects of Christianity, usually Roman Catholicism, with their West African religious traditions, such as drumming, dancing, and a belief in spirits that could take over and act through a person:

- **Santería** means “the way of the saints.” Originally an African faith, it became popular in Cuba and then traveled throughout Latin America and to North America.
- **Vodun** means “spirit” or “deity.” This belief system originated with African peoples of Dahomey, Kongo, and Yoruba who were enslaved and living in Saint-Domingue, which is now Haiti.
- **Candomblé** means “dance to honor the gods.” It is a combination of Yoruba, Fon, and Bantu beliefs from different parts of Africa. It developed in Brazil.



Enslaved Africans in the United States also laid the roots for the African American church, a hybrid of Christianity and African spiritual traditions that remains one of the oldest and most stable institutions in African American communities.

Islam About 1 in 10 of the enslaved Africans practiced Islam. While some of the men who sailed with Columbus may have been Muslims, these enslaved Africans became the first significant presence of Islam in the Americas.

Religion in Latin America Several Catholic religious orders in Europe, such as the Dominicans, Jesuits, and Franciscans, sent missionaries to Latin America to convert people to Christianity. The missionaries were so successful that today most Latin Americans are Roman Catholic Christians. In recent decades, Protestant denominations have begun to gain members.

Numerous examples of religious syncretism originated in the Spanish colonies. Catholic saints' days that coincided with days honored by indigenous people were especially celebrated. In Mexico, a cult developed around the dark-complexioned **Virgin of Guadalupe**, who was revered for her ability to perform miracles.

Global Interactions and Religious Conflicts

Syncretic religions also developed in Afro-Eurasia as global interactions intensified. Sufism, for example, with its focus on personal salvation, helped spread Islam and may have influenced Sikhism, which blended Muslim and Hindu belief systems. The Mughal leader Akbar (see Topic 3.2) tried to mediate conflicts between Muslims and Hindus under his control.

Religion also played a role in conflicts as global interactions increased. The split between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims worsened conflicts between the Ottoman and Safavid empires. (See Topic 3.1.) The split between Catholicism and Protestantism, and between official state religions such as Anglicanism and other Protestant sects, helped drive the settlement of North America as people sought freedom to worship as they saw fit.

KEY TERMS BY THEME		
<p>ECONOMY: Strategies capital Commercial Revolution Price Revolution joint-stock companies limited liability East India Company Dutch East India Company triangular trade monopoly</p>	<p>CULTURE: Blending syncretism polygyny creoles Santéria Vodun Candomblé Virgin of Guadalupe</p>	<p>GOVERNMENT: Latin America viceroys audiencias SOCIETY: Slave Trade Dahomey Oyo</p>