

French and Dutch exploration in the New World

French exploration

Spanish successes in the Caribbean attracted the attention of other European nations. Like Spain, France was a Catholic nation and committed to expanding Catholicism around the globe. In the early sixteenth century, it joined the race to explore the New World and exploit the resources of the Western Hemisphere. In 1534, navigator **Jacques Cartier** claimed northern North America for France, naming the area around the St. Lawrence River **New France**. Like many other explorers, Cartier made exaggerated claims about the area's mineral wealth and was unable to send great riches back to France or establish a permanent colony.

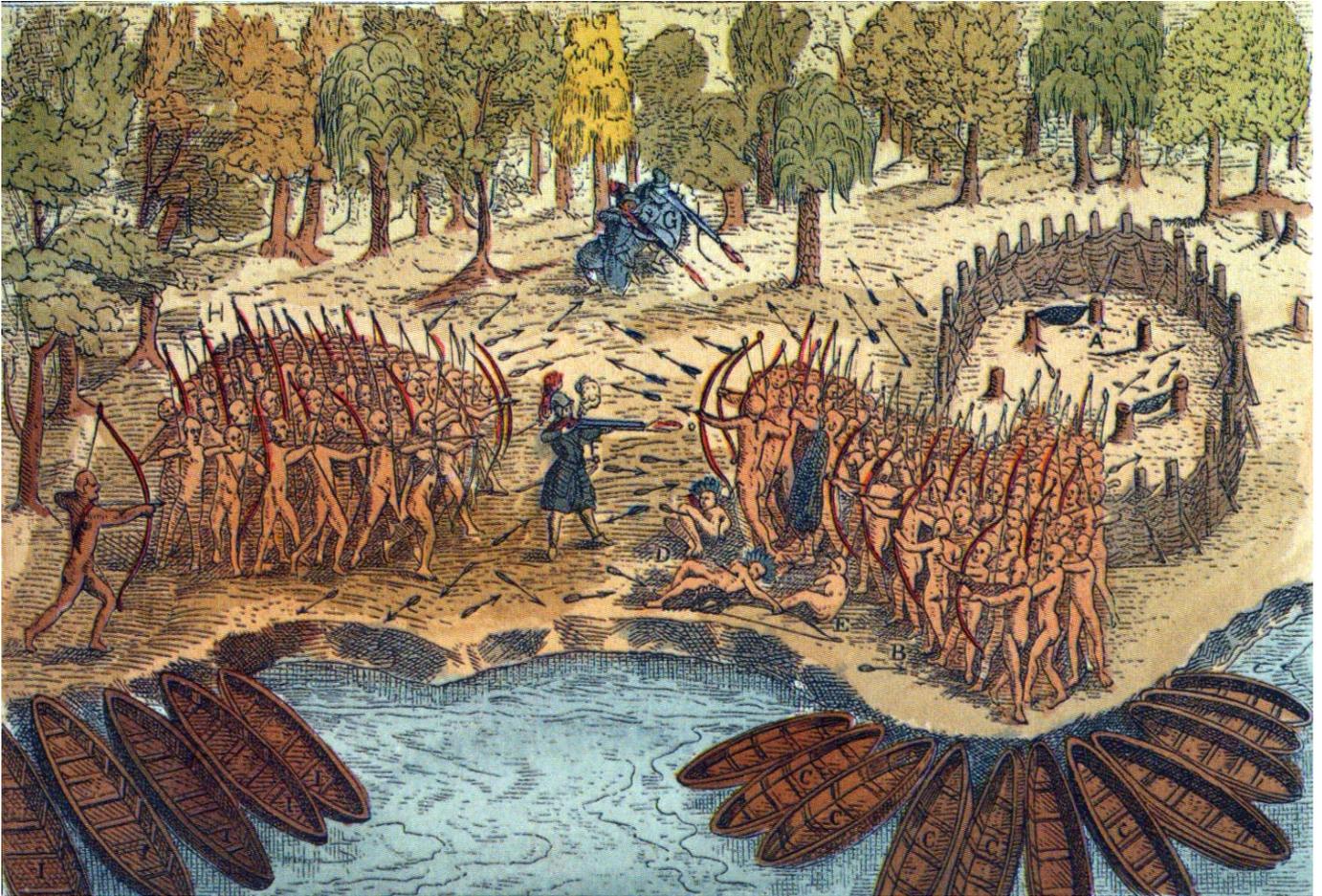


Map of the area explored by Cartier.

Map of the region explored by Jacques Cartier. Image credit: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Samuel de Champlain made great strides for French exploration of the New World. He explored the Caribbean in 1601 and the coast of New England in 1603 before traveling farther north. In 1608 he founded Quebec, and he made numerous Atlantic crossings as he worked tirelessly to promote New France. Unlike other imperial powers, France—through Champlain's efforts—fostered especially good relationships with native peoples as they expanded westward. He learned that

becoming friendly with the native people was essential to successful trade. Champlain explored the Great Lakes, Hudson Bay, and eventually made it to the Mississippi River. The French made an alliance with the **Hurons** and **Algonquians**; Champlain even agreed to fight for them against their enemy, the **Iroquois**.



Engraving showing a battle between the Algonquians, the French, and the Iroquois.

Samuel de Champlain, engraving depicting French soldiers fighting with the Algonquians and Hurons against the Iroquois, c. 1609. Image credit: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

The French were primarily interested in establishing commercially viable colonial outposts, so they created extensive trading networks throughout New France. They relied on native hunters to harvest furs, especially **beaver pelts**, and to exchange these items for French goods, like glass beads. The French also dreamed of replicating the wealth of Spain by colonizing the tropical zones. After Spanish control of the Caribbean began to weaken, the French turned their attention to small islands in the West Indies; by 1635 they had colonized two, Guadeloupe and

Martinique. Though it still lagged far behind Spain, France now boasted its own West Indian colonies with lucrative sugar plantation sites and African slave labor.

Dutch colonization

Dutch entrance into the Atlantic World is part of the larger story of religious and imperial conflict in the early modern era. In the 1500s, **Calvinism**, one of the major Protestant reform movements, began to take root in the Spanish Netherlands and the new sect desired its own state. Holland was established in 1588 as a Protestant nation, but would not be recognized by Spain until 1648. Determined to imperil Protestantism, King Philip of Spain assembled a massive force of over thirty thousand men and 130 ships, and sent this giant navy, known as the **Spanish Armada**, towards England and Holland. But the skilled English navy and a maritime storm destroyed the fleet in 1588. The defeat of the Spanish Armada was only one part of a larger but undeclared war between Protestantism and Catholicism.

Quickly, the Dutch inserted themselves into the Atlantic colonial race. They distinguished themselves as commercial leaders in the seventeenth century, as their mode of colonization relied on powerful corporations: the **Dutch East India Company**, chartered in 1602 to trade in Asia, and the **Dutch West India Company**, established in 1621 to colonize and trade in the Americas.

While employed by the Dutch East India Company in 1609, the English sea captain Henry Hudson explored New York Harbor and the river that now bears his name. Like many explorers of the time, Hudson was actually seeking a northwest passage to Asia and its wealth, but the wealth of coveted beaver pelts alone provided a reason to claim it for the Netherlands. The Dutch named their colony **New Netherlands**, and it served as a fur-trading outpost for the expanding and powerful Dutch West India Company. They expanded in the area to create other trading posts, where their exchange with local Algonquian and Iroquois peoples brought the Dutch and native peoples into alliance. The Dutch became a commercially powerful rival to Spain--Amsterdam soon became trade hub for all the Atlantic World.