

History: Unit 2
Lesson 27 of 30

What drove the Elizabethans to explore the New World?



Cause 1 of exploration: Trade

Background

In the 16th century, England relied heavily on the cloth trade which was based in Antwerp. The Netherlands were controlled by Spain and during **Elizabeth's** reign, trade became more difficult due to ongoing conflict there between the Dutch and the Spanish.

Spain had established a large overseas Empire in the **New World** across the **Americas**. These territories made Spain rich through the export of goods such as sugar and tobacco, mining and through the trade of enslaved Africans.

Impact on exploration

England too wanted some of the wealth that the **New World** could offer, especially as much of it remained largely undiscovered. As a result, Elizabeth began to fund an increasing number of voyages of exploration in the hope that these riches could be discovered and new trade links could be established.



Cause 2 of exploration: The Triangular Trade

Background

Although slavery had existed long before Elizabeth's reign, the 16th century marked the beginning of England's involvement within it and the development of the **Triangular Trade**.

In 1560s, an English sailor called **John Hawkins** made a series of voyages to West Africa. Whilst he was there, he purchased a large number of enslaved Africans. He then transported them across the Atlantic to Spanish colonies in the **New World** and sold them to the Spanish **colonists**. Hawkins then used the money he made through the sale to buy goods such as ginger, sugar and pearls which he then transported and sold back in England.

Impact on exploration

The huge financial profit that Hawkins gained through the trade of enslaved Africans encouraged more English merchants to embark on voyages of exploration and become involved in what became known as the **Triangular Trade**. **The Triangular Trade** developed on a **Transatlantic** scale and caused untold suffering and misery to those who were enslaved as a result.



Cause 3 of exploration: Adventure

Background

As a result of increased voyages of exploration in **Elizabeth's** reign, many accounts were published that told the story of how sailors and explorers to the New World had made their fortune and riches there.

Impact on exploration

In the 16th century, even though voyages of exploration were very dangerous, many young sailors embarked on them in the hope that they would both make their own fortune and at the same time have an adventure. Poverty and unemployment was also on the rise in England, making exploration seem like an even more enticing prospect.



Cause 4 of exploration: New technologies

One development in technology was improved ship design. A new type of ship called a **Galleon** was developed in the 16th century. **Galleons** were much larger and had more masts and sails than traditional ships. They were also capable of firing from both sides of the ship. This meant they could withstand the harsh conditions that sailors often faced on the long journeys to and from the New World and defend themselves against Spanish attacks.

Another development in technology was improved map design. As a result of increased exploration, journeys began to be recorded and used to produce more accurate maps. This made it easier for sailors to navigate to their desired location and avoid getting lost. Improved navigation was also made possible due to the invention of instruments such as the **quadrant** and the **astrolabe**, all of which helped sailors to more accurately follow the routes on the maps. By 1584, the English mathematician **Thomas Harriot** had also worked out a simpler way of using the sun to calculate the true sailing direction of a ship.

Impact on exploration

These developments in technology helped to encourage exploration as it made voyages of discovery safer, easier and faster.



Drake's circumnavigation of the Globe (1577-1580)

Background

Francis Drake was one of the most famous English privateers of Elizabeth's reign. In 1577, he set off on an expedition on his ship The Golden Hind. He had been sent on the voyage to damage Spanish interests at a time when Anglo-Spanish relations were poor and to gain treasure. Although he did not intend to, during the voyage **Drake** became the second person to successfully circumnavigate (sail the whole way around) the Globe. On the voyage **Drake** and his crew had raided Spanish ports and ships and taken their treasure.

When **Drake** returned to England in 1580, he returned with around £400,000 worth of treasure which had been taken from the Spanish ports and ships. This made both **Drake** and Elizabeth wealthy. Elizabeth I knighted **Drake** in 1580 as a reward for his voyage.



What were the consequences of Drake's circumnavigation of the Globe?

Encouraging colonisation and exploration in the New World

During Drake's voyage, he stopped in a bay off (present day) California as the Golden Hind needed repairs. In spite of the fact that **Native Americans** were already inhabiting the area, Drake decided to claim it in England's name and he named it **Nova Albion**. This encouraged the idea that English people could freely colonise the Americas, and lead other explorers such as **Sir Walter Raleigh** to try and colonise **Virginia** in the 1580s. **Drake's** voyages also allowed a lot of information about the New World to be gathered, which was then shared with other explorers who set out on their own voyages.

Relationship with Spain

By the 1570s, relations between England and Spain were poor. During the voyage, **Drake** attacked and stole from Spanish ships, ports and colonies in the New World. When he returned to England in 1580 he brought back over £400,0000 worth of treasure. As a reward for his voyage, **Elizabeth I** knighted him. Drake's actions angered **King Philip II of Spain** who saw **Drake's** actions as direct attack on Spanish interests and power in the New World. **King Philip** saw Drake's actions as piracy and was even more infuriated when Elizabeth I endorsed his actions by knighting him.



Glossary: Page 1

New World - A term used to refer to The Americas, where Europeans initially settled..

The Americas - North and South America, including Caribbean islands.

Triangular Trade - A term used to describe a system that was in place from the early 16th to late 19th century. Goods were shipped from Britain to West Africa to be exchanged for enslaved Africans, who would then be shipped to the West Indies and exchanged for goods such as sugar and rum. These commodities (goods) were then shipped back to Britain to be sold.

Colonists - People who settle in an area of land that they have taken over that was not their original home.

Transatlantic - A term that means 'across the Atlantic'.



Glossary: Page 2

Galleons - A new type of ship developed in the 16th century.

Quadrant - An instrument used to take measurements.

Astrolabe - An instrument used to take measurements and tell the time.

Thomas Harriot - An English mathematician who worked out a simpler way of using the sun to calculate the true sailing direction of a ship.

Native Americans - Indigenous peoples (those who lived on the land before Europeans arrived) of North, Central, and South America.

Nova Albion - The name given to the area of land in California that Francis Drake claimed in England's name in 1579. It translates to 'New Albion'.



Comprehension questions

1. How did voyages of exploration make England wealthier?
2. What motivated people to go on voyages of discovery in the 16th century?
3. Why did Sir Francis Drake undertake his voyage on the Golden Hind between 1577 and 1580?
4. What were the consequences of Sir Francis Drake's circumnavigation of the Globe?
5. **Challenge question:** Explain why there was an increase in exploration of the New World during the reign of Elizabeth I.

Challenge question sentence starters

One reason why there was an increase in exploration during the reign of Elizabeth I was....

This lead to an increase in exploration because...

