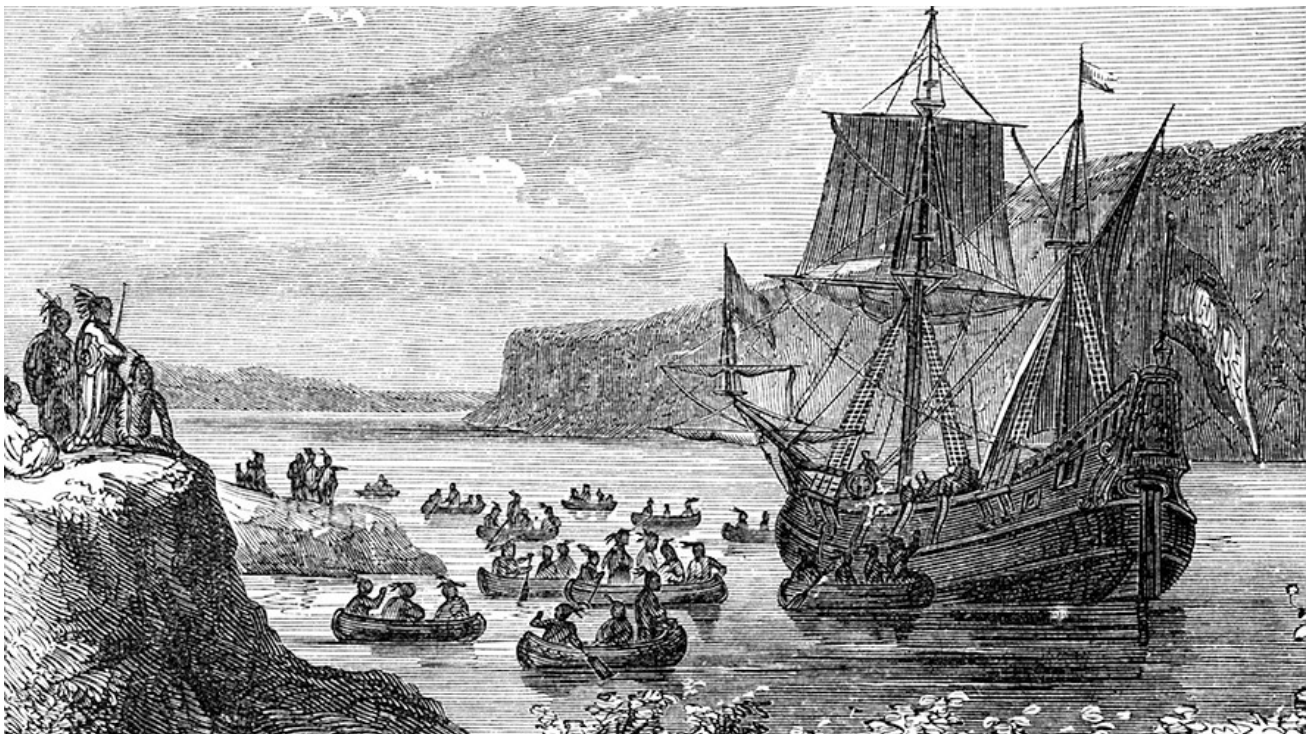


Imperial Rivalries, Part Two: England, France and Holland Race to New World

By Peter C. Mancall, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History on 04.26.17

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Level **MAX**



An illustration of Henry Hudson's ship, the Half Moon, arriving at Manhattan in 1609 on behalf of the Dutch East India Company. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

The second in a three-part series

The agreements of the early 1490s made sense in a Europe where the Spanish and the Portuguese were the dominant maritime players. But, over the course of the 16th century, other Europeans also recognized the benefits of long-distance commerce and conquest. The French had been interested in possibilities of Atlantic enterprise since the early decades of the 16th century. The Breton explorer Jacques Cartier made three voyages — in 1534, 1535-1536, and 1541-1542 — as part of an effort to expand knowledge of North America and identify a possible route through the continent to the South Sea. He never found that passage, but he did explore the St. Lawrence Valley and laid an initial French claim to Canada. By mid-century, a group of mapmakers clustered in Dieppe had produced a series of new maps, based on Portuguese sea charts (called portolans), which hinted at what explorers would find. In July 1608, Samuel Champlain, after exploring other territory farther south, established Quebec

City, which would become the central colonial outpost of New France. Such grand assertions — such as claiming ownership of Canada based on establishing a relatively small community — were not unique. In 1609, the Dutch-employed English captain Henry Hudson, after failing to find the Northeast Passage (which he hoped would take him through open water north of Russia to the Pacific), crossed the Atlantic and eventually made his way up the river that now

bears his name. In the years that followed, the Dutch laid a formal claim to this region, calling it New Netherland and establishing their main outpost on the island of Manhattan.



Search for the Northwest Passage

The English, for their part, schemed to gain control of much of North America, hoping — as did the French and the Dutch — to find the Northwest Passage, a water route to Asia that European mapmakers were convinced existed somewhere in North America. Whoever found that route would be able to control passage from the Atlantic to the South Sea (now the Pacific Ocean) and from there to Japan, China and the Spice Islands.

Since Europeans had fallen in love with East Asian silk as well as the cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, and peppers from places like Banda much earlier, these 16th-century explorers knew there was enormous demand for whatever they could bring back. A northern route would in

theory drastically cut the length of the journey, thus ensuring that the spices sailors hauled home would be fresher than those brought by other Europeans who took southern routes around Africa or South America. A quick water route would also have enabled northern Europeans to cut off both the Spanish, who got to the East efficiently only after they claimed Mexico and built a major port at Acapulco (so they could send silver to the Philippines to purchase spices and silks), as well as the Portuguese, who reached the Pacific by sailing around Africa and then across the Indian Ocean. Even more important, the discovery of the northerly route would (at least in the opinion of the English) prove that God favored the Reformation and hence reward those who broke away from Rome — a far greater prize than the demarcation line with which the pope had rewarded Spain and Portugal.

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Quiz

- 1 Which of the following aspects of the article is NOT thoroughly discussed?
- (A) how France explored and claimed significant areas in Canada
 - (B) why European countries were so interested in trading with Asia
 - (C) how a shortcut to Asia would specifically benefit many European countries
 - (D) why England felt the need to prove that God favored its religious choices
- 2 Which of the following sentences from the article MOST suggests that finding a sea route through North America to the Pacific Ocean would place great power in the hands of those who discovered it?
- (A) But, over the course of the 16th century, other Europeans also recognized the benefits of long-distance commerce and conquest.
 - (B) By mid-century, a group of mapmakers clustered in Dieppe had produced a series of new maps, based on Portuguese sea charts (called portolans), which hinted at what explorers would find.
 - (C) Whoever found that route would be able to control passage from the Atlantic to the South Sea (now the Pacific Ocean) and from there to Japan, China and the Spice Islands.
 - (D) A northern route would in theory drastically cut the length of the journey, thus ensuring that the spices sailors hauled home would be fresher than those brought by other Europeans who took southern routes around Africa or South America.

- 3 Read this selection from the last paragraph of the article.

Even more important, the discovery of the northerly route would (at least in the opinion of the English) prove that God favored the Reformation and hence reward those who broke away from Rome — a far greater prize than the demarcation line with which the pope had rewarded Spain and Portugal.

By this, the author implies that:

- (A) the English were looking forward to outdoing other explorers by finding better maps and routes
 - (B) the English were hoping to find a shorter route to prove that God stood with the Reformation too
 - (C) the English explorers were interested in being able to cut the Spanish explorers and traders off
 - (D) the English were finding routes to Asia in order to get away from the influence of the pope and Rome
- 4 For the European explorers, finding a shorter route to Asia through North America was important for all the following reasons, EXCEPT:
- (A) to establish colonies or outposts between Europe and Asia for convenient trading
 - (B) to ensure the freshness and the quality of the spices that were bought in Asia
 - (C) to claim ownership of parts of Asia where the spices and the silk were known to be excellent
 - (D) to no longer depend on the Portuguese and the Spanish colonies and traders