

OVERVIEW OF COLONIZATION



A colony is a place ruled by a foreign country. When we think of colonies we generally think of the colonies ruled by the Europeans, like America, Australia, and Canada. The beginning of these European colonies happened during a time known as "The Age of Discovery".

EUROPEAN COLONIES

By the 1400's the Spanish and Portuguese had a fairly good idea about navigation, and sailing. They had seen what the Muslims had, and they wanted some for themselves. They decided that if they could trade directly with the people of the Far East, they could save money. So they set out to explore. They had to go by ship, since the Muslims controlled the land routes, and they weren't going to give them up without a fight.

Unfortunately, the Europeans didn't know quite as much about navigation as they thought. Instead of finding India and the Far East, they found parts of Africa, and the America's. When they landed at these places, they tried to do trade, but finding that they had much better weapons than the native inhabitants, they became greedy. They decided to take everything, instead of trading for it.

They weren't entirely successful in their takeovers, and in some places they set up trading posts. In the places that they gained control they took what they wanted, without payment, and ruled over the people there. Not only did they take goods, but they also took people, as slaves, to work for them.

The Portuguese must have been better at navigation than the Spanish, because they set up trading posts in South Asia and India as well as Africa and they took control of parts of South America. The Spanish took control of parts of North America, and most of Central America.

Once the Spanish and Portuguese started coming home, and boasting of their riches, the rest of the Europeans thought they had better see if they could do it, too. Pretty soon the Dutch, the British, and the French had established colonies and trading posts throughout the world. The countries ruling the colonies tried to force the people living there to become like them, and adopt the same religion and customs as the ruling country.

THE REASONS FOR COLONIZATION

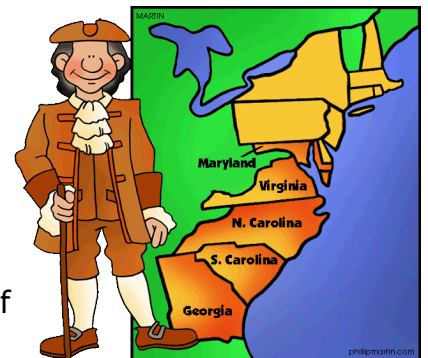
There were many different ideas about why colonization was a good thing. The explorers had to persuade someone to pay for their trips, so they came up with reasons why it was a good idea. Here are some of the reasons they gave, including money, culture, and religion.

Getting Things Cheaply

In the very beginning it was seen as a way to buy things cheaply. Once the explorers discovered how easily they could overpower the natives of most of the countries, they decided to take things rather than buy them.

A Market Place for Goods

The colonizers had a lot of goods they wanted to sell. They could produce far more things than they could sell to their own people. They were always fighting with the people around them, so they needed to find new people to sell their things to. They also saw it as a way to give the troublesome poor people jobs. They could be put to work making things for the expeditions and things to trade and use in the "new" countries.



Spreading Religion and Culture

Most of the colonizing countries saw it as their duty to God, to convert the native people to their religion. They also thought that the natives were savages, and felt that it was their duty to teach them how to behave "properly".



Somewhere to Dump "Extra" People

There were more people in the European countries than the governments could handle. The poor people were always causing troubles, wanting food and clothes, and not wanting to pay taxes. The idea was that the countries could send these people to the colonies. Since they were poor, they couldn't afford to pay to go. They had their ticket paid for them by a trading company. Then they had to work for the trading company for a number of years, without pay, before they were free. This was a great way of getting rid of the troublemakers, and at the same time, a cheap way of setting up the colonies.

Another way of getting rid of people, who were considered troublesome, was to send convicted prisoners to the colonies. The most famous example of this is Australia. These colonies were called "penal colonies". Although a few of the people sent to them were truly criminals, most were just poor people, accused of doing things like stealing food or clothes for their children.

Building Armies and Navies

The Europeans were a very troublesome lot. They were forever fighting with one another. Since the colonies had natives, who didn't want the colonists, they were going to have to fight. Colonists who had been fighting natives for years would make very good soldiers. To get to the colonies they had to use ships, so more ships were built and more sailors trained. In times of war these ships and sailors could be used to fight in the Navy.

Glorification of the Country

At the time that these colonies were being founded, the European countries were all still ruled by Kings and Queens. The Kings and Queens had the final say on explorations and discoveries, since they paid for them. In order to persuade them to agree, the explorers told them how many new subjects (citizens) they would rule over, and how much land they would own. They were a pretty greedy lot, so they liked the idea.

Greed

If you look at all of the reasons that were given, you can probably see that the biggest reason was greed. They could buy, or get things cheaply. They could sell the things they made. They could take exotic woods and stones to build grand houses and other buildings. They could make themselves more important and powerful than their neighbors.

Perhaps the spreading of religion and culture were the only reasons not tied to greed. The colonizers really thought that they were doing something good for the native people. Even the spreading of religion was tied in some ways to power. The Europeans were busy fighting about the "true" religion. Each side thought that more people following their religion would prove that they were right.