

# Colonization of South America

## Introduction

A major part of South America's history is its colonization by European countries. Maps made by Europeans during the colonial period show what Europeans thought they could get from South America and how they were going to get it.

**These are pages from a book of letters by Christopher Columbus, published in 1494.**

Even though Columbus had not made it to South America proper when this book was published, he *had* explored in the Caribbean, and the history of colonial South America is tied to the history of the Caribbean.

*Interaction:* The page on the left features a portrait of King Ferdinand of Spain. Why would he make it into the book? (Columbus was sailing for Spain when he "discovered" the Americas.)

This second page shows that it did not take long for Europeans to begin enslaving the native population. When Columbus' ship sailed back to Spain on his second voyage in 1494, he took over 100 people as slaves, most of whom died on the journey or soon after arriving in Europe.



**This is a map of Santa Domingo, the first permanent European settlement in the Americas.**

Santa Domingo, a city in modern-day Dominican Republic, was founded in 1496.

*Interaction:* Does anyone know what language is spoken in the Dominican Republic? (Spanish). Why is Spanish spoken there? (It was colonized by the Spanish).

*Interaction:* 1496 is a very early date for European settlements in the New World. Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement, was not founded until 110 years later. What helped Santa Domingo survive for so long? (no harsh winters, climate supported the growing of tobacco, which was in high demand in Europe).

**This map, made by a Dutch mapmaker, shows an image of one the saddest parts of colonial history, slavery.**

In 1501, less than 10 years after Columbus first landed in the New World, the first African slaves that were brought to the Americas arrived. The enslaved Africans who had survived the journey across the Atlantic would likely perish from being overworked or in the smallpox epidemics that started ravaging the Caribbean and South America as early as 1507.

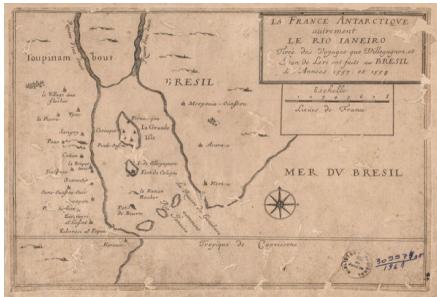
*Interaction:* Initially, Columbus had wanted to use Native Americans as slaves. Does anyone know why Europeans switched to enslaving Africans? (Native Americans knew the land and could escape and survive easily. They also succumbed to European diseases in high numbers, as they had no immunities to European diseases. Africans tended to survive longer and were less likely to run away, as they didn't know how to survive in the unfamiliar land).

**This map of Pernambuco, a part of Brazil, features an image of a sugar cane plantation.**

Sugarcane is the plant that sugar, molasses, and rum is made from. Although it had been cultivated for years in the Caribbean, it wasn't until 1521 that it was planted in Brazil. This increased the demand for African slaves. Working on a sugar plantation was grueling, often deadly, work.

Ironically, European slave traders often paid African slavers rum in exchange for slaves.

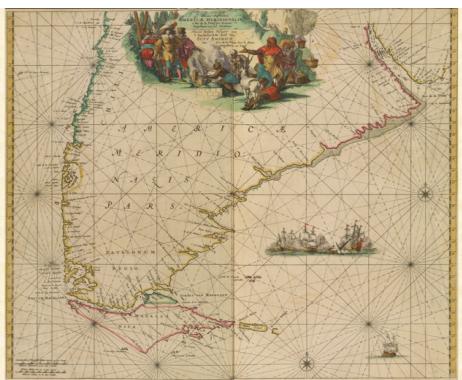




### This map shows a French colony in modern-day Brazil.

While many European powers founded colonies in the Caribbean early on, it was primarily the Spanish and Portuguese who were making a concerted colonization effort in South America at first. In 1555, however, the French found La France Antarctique, a colony that would later morph into Rio de Janeiro of Brazil. The colony held on for 12 years, but the Portuguese destroyed it in 1567. After that, there is not a lot of French effort to colonize South America.

*Interaction:* Does anyone know where the French focused their colonizing efforts instead? (Caribbean, Canada, parts of Africa).



### The image at the top of this maps depicts South America's rich gold deposits, one of the earliest draws for European colonizers.

In 1604, the English founded a colony in Guyana, with the intent to mine nearby gold. The colony produced little to no gold, however, and was abandoned within two years. The English, like the French, do not make a concerted colonizing effort in South America after this.

*Interaction:* Who can tell me where the British focused their colonizing efforts after this? (Caribbean, North America, India, Australia)



### This is an image showing the Dutch capture of Elmina, a slaving colony in Africa.

*Interaction:* The taking of Elmina was the first action taken by the Dutch West India Company, whose sole purpose was to coordinate the capture of Spanish and Portuguese colonies in South America. Why would having a slaving colony in Africa be so important for colonizing South America? (having control of South American colonies required control of slaving colonies in Africa, because you could not make money with your colonies without slaves)

It was not until the West India Company was founded that the Dutch had any success in their colonizing efforts in South America. After the 1620s, the Dutch had a considerable presence in Brazil, Chile, Guyana, and Suriname.

### These maps were made over one hundred years apart. Comparing them reveals how Europeans' ideas about South America changed.

In 1520 Magellan became the first European to enter the Pacific Ocean from the east. At first it was believed he had found a small gap between South America and "Terra Australius", a mythical southern continent that Europeans thought must exist to balance out the Earth's rotation. The gap was called the "Straits of Magellan".

For many decades, Europeans rounded South America's tip by going through the deadly straits of Magellan, believing that Tierra del Fuego was part of a large, unexplored Southern continent. It wasn't until the early 1600s that seafarers knew Tierra del Fuego was, in fact, a relatively small island, and that the Southernmost cape of Tierra del Fuego, Cape Horn, was a much easier area to sail through than the straits of Magellan.

*Interaction:* Compare these maps. Besides Terra Australius, what does the first map include that the second map doesn't? (the Caribbean: our way of organizing the world's landmasses into 7 continents is mostly arbitrary. Many of the older maps of South America will also include the islands of the Caribbean. Beginning in the 17th and 18th century, however, people begin to think of the Americas as two separate continents.)



### Activity Transition

Now that we have a basic understanding of how South America was colonized, we're going to examine some maps of South America and figure out who made them and when.