



*A Discourse Concerning Western Planting*  
Richard Hakluyt (1584)

A Discourse Concerning Western Planting was written to encourage Queen Elizabeth I of England to provide financial support for the planting of colonies in North America. The book-length document wasn't published but was delivered directly to Elizabeth in manuscript form. The author, Richard Hakluyt, an Anglican priest active in England's international politics, gives various reasons why England would benefit from American colonies. Many of these reasons have to do with England's competition with other European countries—chiefly Spain, which had become rich and powerful from the silver it extracted from its colonies in Mexico and Peru. In Hakluyt's argument for colonization, religious considerations are entwined with political and economic ones.

*That this western discovery will be greatly for the enlargement of the gospel of Christ, whereunto the princes of the Reformed religion are chiefly bound, amongst whom her Majesty is principal.*

Seeing that the people of that part of America from 30 degrees in Florida northward unto 63 degrees (which is yet in no Christian prince's actual possession) are idolaters; and that those which Esteban Gomez brought from the coast of Norumbega in the year 1524 worshipped the sun, the moon, and the stars [...]; and that those of Canada and Hochelaga [...] believe not at all in God [...], and yet notwithstanding they are very easy to be persuaded [...] and were very desirous to become Christians and would fain have been baptized [...]—it remaineth to be thoroughly weighed and considered by what means, and by whom, this most godly and Christian work may be performed of enlarging the glorious gospel of Christ and reducing of infinite multitudes of these simple people that are in error into the right and perfect way of their salvation. [...] Now, the kings and queens of England have the name of Defenders of the Faith, by which title I think they are not only charged to maintain and patronize the faith of Christ but also to enlarge and advance the same. [...]

Now, the means to send such as shall labor effectually in this business is by planting one or two colonies of our nation upon that firm, where they may remain in safety, and first learn the language of the people near adjoining [...] and by little and little acquaint themselves with their manner [...] Otherwise, for preachers to come unto them rashly, without some such preparation for their safety, it were nothing else but to run to their apparent and certain destruction, as it happened unto those Spanish friars that, before any planting, without strength and company, landed in Florida, where they were miserably massacred by the savages. On the other side, by means of planting first, the small nation of the Portingales towards the south and east have planted the Christian faith, according to their manner, and have erected many bishoprics and colleges to train up the youth of the infidels in the same [...] The like may be said of the Spaniards, who [...] have established in the West Indies three archbishoprics—to wit, Mexico, Lima, and Cusco—and thirteen other bishoprics there named, and have built above 200 houses of religion in the space of fifty years or thereabouts. Now if they, in their superstition, by means of their planting in those parts, have done so great things in so short space, what may we hope for in our true and sincere religion [...T]he people of America cry out unto us, their next neighbors, to come and help them and bring unto them the glad tidings of the gospel. [...]

And this enterprise the princes of the religion (among whom her Majesty is principal) ought the rather to take in hand, because the papists confirm themselves and draw others to their side, showing that they are the true catholic church because they have been the only converters of many millions of infidels to Christianity. Yea, I myself have been demanded of them: How many infidels have been by us converted? [...] Now, therefore, I trust the time is at hand when, by her Majesty's forwardness in this enterprise, [...] this objection and such like shall be answered by our fruitful labor in God's harvest among the infidels [...]

*That this western voyage will yield unto us all the commodities of Europe, Africa, and Asia, as far as we were wont to travel, and supply the wants of all our decayed trades.*

[...] The countries, therefore, of America whereunto we have just title, as being first discovered by Sebastian Cabot at the cost of that prudent prince King Henry VII, from Florida northward to 67 degrees [...], being answerable in climate to Barbary, Egypt, Syria, Persia, Turkey, Greece, all the islands of the Levant Sea, Italy, Spain, Portingale, France, Flanders, High Allemagne, Denmark, Estland, Poland, and Muscovy, may presently or within a short space afford unto us, for little or nothing and with much more safety, either all or a great part of the commodities which the aforesaid countries do yield us at a very dear hand and with manifold dangers.

[...C]redible persons, which were personally between 30 and 63 degrees in America, [...] affirmed unto the princes and kings which set them out that they found there gold, silver, copper, lead, and pearls in abundance; precious stones, as turquoises and emeralds; spices and drugs, as pepper, cinnamon, cloves, rhubarb, musk called cantor, turpentine; silk worms, fairer than ours of Europe; white and red cotton; infinite multitudes of all kind of beasts, with their tallow and hides, dressed and undressed; cochineal [...] and many other kinds of colors for clothing; millions of all kinds of fowls for food and feathers; salt for fishing; excellent vines in many places for wines; the soil apt to bear olives for oil; all kinds of fruits, as oranges, almonds, filberts, figs, plums, mulberries, raspis, pomme d'api, melons; all kind of odoriferous trees and date trees, cypresses, cedars, bay, sapin, honey, and wax; and in Newfoundland, abundance of pines and fir trees, ashes, and other like, to make masts and deal boards; pitch, tar, rosin, and hemp for cables and cordage; and, up within the Grand Bay, exceeding quantity of all kind of precious furs [...]; also, such abundance of train oil, to make soap, and of fish as a third part of Europe is furnished therewith.

I may well and truly conclude, with reason and authority, that all the commodities of all our old decayed and dangerous trades, in all Europe, Africa, and Asia haunted by us, may in short space, for little or nothing, [...] be had in that part of America which lieth between 30 and 60 degrees of northerly latitude, if by our slackness we suffer not the French or others to prevent us. [...]

*That this voyage will be a great bridle to the Indies of the King of Spain, and a means that we arrest at our pleasure, [...] every year, one or two hundred sail of his subjects' ships [...]*

The cause why the King of Spain, these three or four years last past, was at such intolerable charges in furnishing out so many navies to win Terceira and the other small islands of the Azores [...] was the opportunity of the places in intercepting his West Indian fleet at their return homeward, as a matter that toucheth him indeed to the quick. But the planting of two or three

strong forts upon some good havens (whereof there is great store) between Florida and Cape Breton would be a matter, in short space, of greater damage as well to his fleet as to his Western Indies; for we should not only oftentimes endanger his fleet in the return thereof, but also in few years put him in hazard in losing some part of Nova Hispania. [...]

We are, moreover, to understand that the savages of Florida are the Spaniards' mortal enemies and will be ready to join with us against them [...] Also, within the land on the north side of Nova Hispania, there is a people called Chichimeca, which are big and strong men and valiant archers, which have continual wars with the Spaniards [...] Now, if we (being thereto provoked by Spanish injuries) would either join with these savages or send or give them armor, as the Spaniards arm our Irish rebels, we should trouble the King of Spain more in those parts than he hath or can trouble us in Ireland, and hold him at such bay as he was never yet held at. For if (as the aforesaid Miles Phillips writeth) it be true that one negro which fled from his cruel Spanish master is received and made captain of multitudes of the Chichimeca, and daily doth grievously afflict them, and hath almost enforced them to leave and abandon their silver mines in those quarters, what damage might divers hundreds of Englishmen do them, being grown once into familiarity with that valiant nation. [...]

*What special means may bring King Philip from his high throne and make him equal to the princes his neighbors; wherewithal is shown his weakness in the West Indies.*

[...]t is known to Sir Francis Drake, and to Mr. Hawkins and Miles Phillips (which Miles lived 14 years in Nova Hispania), [...] that the islands there abound with people and nations that reject the proud and bloody government of the Spaniard and that do mortally hate the Spaniard. And they know also that the Moors and such as the Spaniards have brought thither for the mines and for slavery have fled from them into the inlands, and of themselves maintain in many places frontier wars against the Spaniard [...] And it is thought that Sir Francis Drake and some other English are of so great credit with the Cimarrons and with those that maintain those frontier wars that he might, bringing thither a few captains and some of our meaner soldiers late trained in the Base Countries, [...] bring to pass that, joining with those inland people, King Philip might either be deprived of his government there, or at the least of the taking of his yearly benefit of the mines.

[...]f platforms of these things be set down and executed duly [...], no doubt but the Spanish empire falls to the ground, and the Spanish king [...] will, in short space, become a laughingstock for all the world, with such a maim to the Pope and to that side as never happened to the See of Rome by the practice of the late king of famous memory, her Majesty's father, or by all the former practices of all the Protestant princes of Germany [...] If you touch him in the Indies, you touch the apple of his eye; for take away his treasure, [...] his old bands of soldiers will soon be dissolved, his purposes defeated, his power and strength diminished, his pride abated, and his tyranny utterly suppressed. [...]

And to say the truth, what nation, I pray you, of all Christendom loveth the Spaniard, the scourge of the world, but from the teeth forward and for advantage? The Italians, which sometime were lords of the earth, do many ways show the utter dislike of their satanical arrogance and insolences [...] The city of Rome, being sacked by Charles the Emperor, the Pope and cardinals

taken and imprisoned, cannot brook their doings in their hearts. The Venetians stand daily in fear of them, almost as much as of the Turk, and doubt that, if they be not with speed restrained, they will enclose them and use them at their pleasure, being on both sides become almost lords of the mouth of the Straits of Gibraltar. The French, remembering the taking of their king prisoner, their cruelty in Florida, the late overthrow of Strozzi and their fleet, their taking of Terceira, and other disgraces, hate them, for the most part, worse than scorpions. The princes of Germany, the Duke of Saxony, the Landgrave of Hesse, the Duke of Cleve, the Duke Casimir have sustained wrongs sufficient to make them his mortal enemies. His innumerable outrages in the Netherlands have enforced the Flemings to those terms which now they stand at. Their manifold practices to supplant us of England give us most occasion to bethink ourselves how we may abate and pull down their high minds. [...]

*That speedy planting in divers fit places is most necessary upon these last lucky western discoveries, for fear of the danger of being prevented by other nations which have the like intention [...]*

Having by God's good guiding and merciful direction achieved happily this present western discovery, after the seeking the advancement of the kingdom of Christ, the second chief and principal end of the same is traffic [...]. And therefore, upon the first said view taken by the ships that are to be sent thither, we are to plant upon the mouths of the great navigable rivers which are there, by strong order of fortification, and there to plant our colonies. And so, being first there settled in strength, with men, armor, and munition, and having our navy within our bays, havens, and roads, we shall be able to let the entrance of all subjects of foreign princes [...]. And these fortifications shall keep the natural people of the country in obedience and good order. [...] If the next neighbors shall attempt any annoy to our people, we are kept safe by our forts; and we may, upon violence and wrong offered by them, run upon the rivers with our ships, pinnaces, barques, and boats, and enter into league with the petit princes, their neighbors, that have always lightly wars one with another; and so, entering league now with the one and then with the other, we shall purchase our own safety and make ourselves lords of the whole.

Contrariwise, [...] if we do procrastinate the planting [...], the French, the Normans, the Bretons, or the Dutch, or some other nation, will not only prevent us of the mighty Bay of St. Lawrence, where they have gotten the start of us already (though we had the same revealed to us by books published and printed in English before them), but also will deprive us of that good land which now we have discovered. Which if they do, [...] we shall have our enemies or doubtful friends round about us and shall [...] incur great danger and inconvenience in suffering papists, by planting round about us, to take from us all succors and to let them enrich themselves, under our noses, to be better able to supplant or overrun us. [...]

*That by these colonies, the northwest passage to Cathay and China may easily, quickly, and perfectly be searched out, as well by river and overland as by sea [...]*

[T]he judgment of Gerardus Mercator, that excellent geographer, which his son Rumold Mercator showed me in a letter of his and drew out for me in writing, of wise men is not lightly to be regarded. These were his words: [...] "You write"—saith he to his son—"great matters, though very briefly, of the new voyage, whereat I wonder that it was not these many years

heretofore attempted; for there is no doubt but there is a straight and short way open into the west, even to Cathay, into which kingdoms, if they govern their voyage well, they shall gather the most noble merchandise of all the world and shall make the name of Christ to be known to many idolaters and heathen people.” [...]

God, which doeth all things in his due time and hath in his hand the hearts of all princes, stir up the mind of her Majesty at length to assist her most willing and forward subjects to the performance of this most godly and profitable action, which was [...] left, as it seemeth, to be accomplished by her (as the three years’ golden voyage to Ophir was by Solomon), to the making of her realm and subjects most happy, and herself most famous to all posterity. Amen. [...]

*An answer to the bull of the donation of all the West Indies granted to the kings of Spain by Pope Alexander VI, who was himself a Spaniard born.*

Whereas Francisco Lopez de Gomara, in [...] his *General History of the Indies*, putteth down that Pope Alexander VI [...] gave of his free grace, to the kings of Spain, all the isles and firm lands which they should discover towards the west, and therewithal allegeth the bull itself—I answer, that no pope had any lawful authority to give any such donation at all [...O]ur Savior Christ confessed openly to Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world. Why, then, doth the Pope, that would be Christ’s servant, take upon him the division of so many kingdoms of the world? [...] God never gave unto the popes any such authority.

[...T]hough Pope Alexander VI, by his unequal division, hath so puffed up and inflamed with pride his most ambitious and insatiable countrymen that they are grown to this high conceit of themselves, that they shall shortly attain to be lords and only seigniors of all the earth [...], yet God that sitteth in heaven laugheth them and their partitions to scorn, and he will abase and bring down their proud looks and humble their faces to the dust; yea, he will make them, at his good time and pleasure, to confess that the earth was not made for them only [...]

*A brief collection of certain reasons to induce her Majesty and the state to take in hand the western voyage and the planting there.*

[...B]y planting at Norumbega, [...] her Majesty may, by the benefit of the seat, having won good and royal havens, have plenty of excellent trees for masts, of goodly timber to build ships [...], and all things incident for a navy royal [...] How easy a matter may it be to this realm [...] to be lords of all those seas, and to spoil Philip’s Indian navy, and to deprive him of yearly passage of his treasure into Europe, and consequently to abate the pride of Spain and of the supporter of the great Antichrist of Rome, and to pull him down in equality to his neighbor princes, and consequently to cut off the common mischiefs that come to all Europe by the peculiar abundance of his Indian treasure—and this without difficulty. [...]

We shall, by planting there, enlarge the glory of the gospel, and from England plant sincere religion, and provide a safe and a sure place to receive people from all parts of the world that are forced to flee for the truth of God’s word. [...]

The Spaniards govern in the Indies with all pride and tyranny; and like as when people of contrary nature at the sea enter into galleys where men are tied as slaves, all yell and cry with one voice, “*Libertà, libertà,*” as desirous of liberty and freedom—so, no doubt, whensoever the Queen of England, a prince of such clemency, shall seat upon that firm of America and shall be reported throughout all that tract to use the natural people there with all humanity, courtesy, and freedom, they will yield themselves to her government and revolt clean from the Spaniard, and especially when they shall understand that she hath a noble navy and that she aboundeth with a people most valiant for their defense. And [...] this so brought about, her Majesty and her subjects may both enjoy the treasure of the mines of gold and silver, and the whole [...] trade of merchandise, that now passeth thither by the Spaniard’s only hand, [...] to enrich the subjects and, by customs, to fill her Majesty’s coffers to the full.

**Source:** Richard Hakluyt, *A Discourse Concerning Western Planting*, ed. Charles Deane, vol. 2 of *Documentary History of the State of Maine* (Cambridge [MA]: John Wilson & Son, 1877), chaps. 1, 3, 5, 7, 11, 15, 17, 19-20, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/aeu.ark:/13960/t1gh9w40j>. Public domain.

Two place names have been emended from the Deane edition (*Luna* → *Lima*; *Onsco* → *Cusco*) based on E. G. R. Taylor, ed., *The Original Writings and Correspondence of the Two Richard Hakluyts* (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1935), 2:216.

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The use of lowercase for *negro* reproduces the usage of the source publication. Titles of offices such as *king*, *queen*, *pope*, and *cardinal*, typically capitalized in the source, are capitalized in this edited text when used in the singular to refer to a particular bearer of the title, but are converted to lowercase when plural or when used in the singular to refer to the office in general (hence *the Pope* but *no pope*). The word *papists*, inconsistently capitalized in the source, is consistently presented here in lowercase. The word *catholic* has been converted from capital to lowercase at a point where Hakluyt is disputing whether Catholics or Protestants are *the true catholic church*.

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