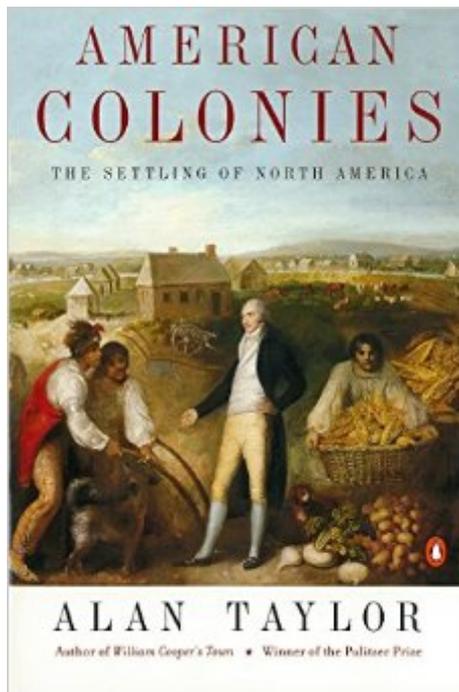


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American Colonies: The Settling Of North America, Vol. 1



Synopsis

A multicultural, multinational history of colonial America from the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Internal Enemy* and *American Revolutions*. In the first volume in the Penguin History of the United States, edited by Eric Foner, Alan Taylor challenges the traditional story of colonial history by examining the many cultures that helped make America, from the native inhabitants from millennia past, through the decades of Western colonization and conquest, and across the entire continent, all the way to the Pacific coast. Transcending the usual Anglocentric version of our colonial past, he recovers the importance of Native American tribes, African slaves, and the rival empires of France, Spain, the Netherlands, and even Russia in the colonization of North America. Moving beyond the Atlantic seaboard to examine the entire continent, *American Colonies* reveals a pivotal period in the global interaction of peoples, cultures, plants, animals, and microbes. In a vivid narrative, Taylor draws upon cutting-edge scholarship to create a timely picture of the colonial world characterized by an interplay of freedom and slavery, opportunity and loss. "Formidable . . . provokes us to contemplate the ways in which residents of North America have dealt with diversity." -The New York Times Book Review

Book Information

Paperback: 544 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; Reprint edition (July 30, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0142002100

ISBN-13: 978-0142002100

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.2 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (140 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #6,312 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #6 in [Books > History > Americas > United States > African Americans > History](#) #7 in [Books > History > Americas > United States > Colonial Period](#) #14 in [Books > History > Africa](#)

Customer Reviews

I first noticed the Native American void in history books just a few years ago. I was trying to find which tribes lived near Frederick Co. Maryland, and the information simply wasn't there. I am a hired researcher, so when I say the information wasn't there, I mean that it would take the average person about a year to track down anything at all on the topic. There is a real void in the history of the

Americas and there are very few books that treat pre-colonial, non-European American history with any sense of depth or fairness. This book truly gives you a full-scale idea of what shaped the Americas into what they are today. Finally you can read about what was happening with the native population during the time of contact and conquest. Finally you can get an idea about the environmental and economical impacts of colonialization, both in the Americas and in Europe. This book is truly a history of "actions" and not "thoughts". Often what we learn in American schools today is what the Puritans were thinking about doing, or what our founding fathers wanted to create out of the Americas. Instead, we learn about the actions they actually took. Which colonies took up the practice of slavery, and why? How successful were the Puritans in being pure? What was Columbus really thinking? While the book feels slanted to the leftist mentality, I think you'll find the author treats all groups fairly, focused on their actions and not their intentions. The few books I've read that tried to cover a more holistic history of the Americas usually go too far in the opposite direction, painting all colonists as depraved ravagers, and all natives as white-washed saints.

In "American Colonies," historian Alan Taylor has created an easily accessible yet highly informative overview of the crucial first era of the history of North America. Taylor does an admirable job of elaborating on the simple framework of names and dates that bore so many contemporary students; he discusses geography, agriculture, trade, as well as the cultures and religions of the myriad groups (both native and European) that created colonial America. Rather than attempting to cover the entire continent in a continuous chronology, Taylor breaks the book into 19 chapters, each describing one geographic area during a given time period (e.g. "Virginia 1570-1650," "New England 1600-1700"). I found this organizational choice to be very effective; it makes the scope of the topic manageable and also allows one to easily research a specific area. The chapter setup is all the better due to the content choices Taylor has made. Rather than focus solely on the 13 British colonies, the book also spends time on the Spanish and French settlements. I fear that many people think Columbus discovered North America in 1492 and then nothing happened until the Pilgrims landed in 1620. Taylor corrects that misperception by including two chapters on the Spanish settlements in Mexico, New Mexico, and Florida before even touching on the British colonies. There are also two chapters on New France and Canada that give greater meaning to the Seven Years War. I was most pleased, however, with the chapter discussing the British West Indies, a geographic area completely ignored by many US History courses. Yet as Taylor explains, the West Indies at that time were FAR more valuable to the Crown than the mainland colonies!

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