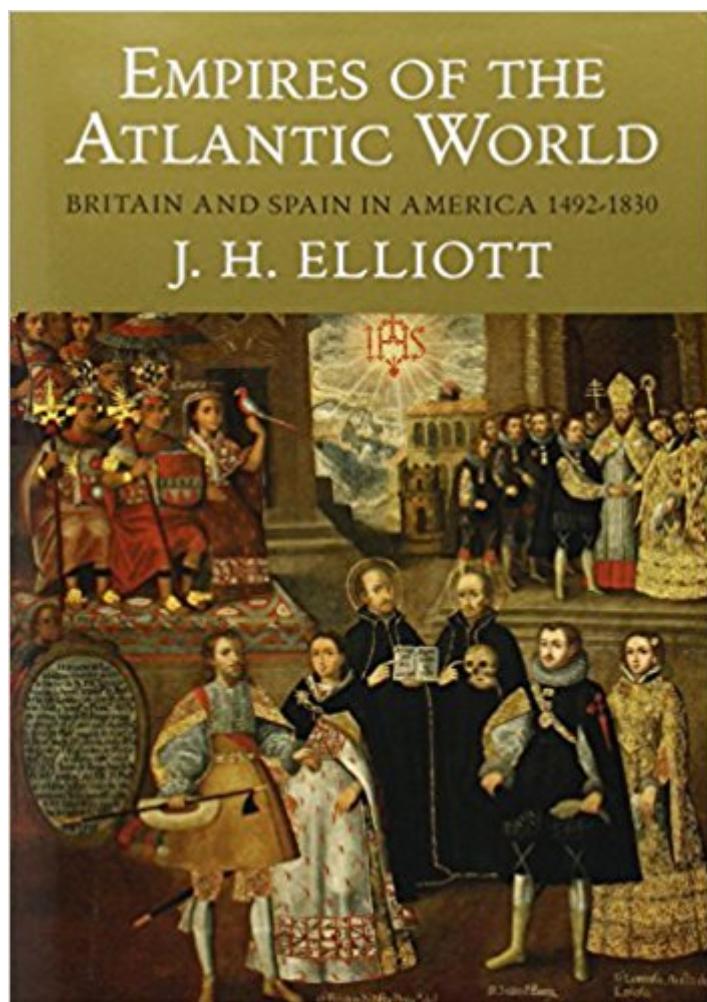


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# Empires Of The Atlantic World: Britain And Spain In America 1492-1830



## Synopsis

This epic history compares the empires built by Spain and Britain in the Americas, from Columbus's arrival in the New World to the end of Spanish colonial rule in the early nineteenth century. J. H. Elliott, one of the most distinguished and versatile historians working today, offers us history on a grand scale, contrasting the worlds built by Britain and by Spain on the ruins of the civilizations they encountered and destroyed in North and South America. Elliott identifies and explains both the similarities and differences in the two empires' processes of colonization, the character of their colonial societies, their distinctive styles of imperial government, and the independence movements mounted against them. Based on wide reading in the history of the two great Atlantic civilizations, the book sets the Spanish and British colonial empires in the context of their own times and offers us insights into aspects of this dual history that still influence the Americas.

## Book Information

Paperback: 608 pages

Publisher: Yale University Press (April 24, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 9780300123999

ISBN-13: 978-0300123999

ASIN: 030012399X

Product Dimensions: 9.6 x 6.7 x 1.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 22 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #74,942 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #306 in Books > History > Europe > Great Britain #2614 in Books > History > World #2866 in Books > History > Americas > United States

## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. In a masterful account, Oxford don Elliott explores the simultaneous development of Spanish and English colonies in the so-called New World. Though colonists tried to recreate traditional institutions on American soil, there were inevitable differences between colonial life and life in the mother countries: familial roles, for example, were reconfigured across the ocean. In addition to differing from Europe, Spanish and British settlements differed from one another, says Elliott. Whereas Spain determined to prevent Jews and Moors from entering its territories, Britain's

grudging acceptance of religious diversity was evidenced in the Crown's allowing, and in some cases encouraging, persecuted minorities to join colonial ventures. The English colonies' fractious Protestantism made Spain's Catholic colonies look homogeneous by contrast. Yet the "pigmentocratic" social order of Spanish colonies proved to be exceedingly complex. English colonies, with their adoption of racial slavery, came to be organized around the deceptively simple categories of black and white, while Spanish America was home to varied ethnic groups that readily produced "mixed-blood" offspring. Ultimately, British colonies would privilege innovation and entrepreneurship, while Spanish-speaking society held on more firmly to "the old hierarchies." Elliott's synthesis represents some of the finest fruits of the study of the Atlantic world. Illus., maps. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"[A] magisterial comparative history of empire of the Americas. . . . [A] richly textured comparative history. . . . [A] meticulously researched and elegantly executed synthesis. . . . Mr. Elliott's achievement is to identify with brilliant clarity the similarities and differences between British and Spanish America while embroidering his analysis with memorable details." —Niall Ferguson, *Wall Street Journal*"[A] monumental analysis of two New World empires . . . Elliott . . . uses the story of each colonisation to illuminate the other. He challenges our prejudices about the Spanish conquest and the patriotic myths that have grown up around the English one. There is nothing black and white about this book. . . . Elliott's writing . . . moves with a gentle rhythm of a sea swell to carry the reader along." —Christian Tyler, *Financial Times Magazine*"A handsome and fascinating study of the two colonisations, so different in their scope, duration and outcome. The contrasts in administration, treatment of the natives and economic viability are intriguing." —Christian Tyler, *Financial Times Magazine*"My favorite recent book of American history is, perhaps surprisingly, by an English scholar of the history of Spain. A model of comparative history, *Empires* succeeds in placing the formative years of the area that became the United States in a consistently illuminating hemispheric perspective." —Eric Foner, *New York Times Book Review*"Our current debate about immigration isn't only about clamping down on the U.S.-Mexican border. It's also about what it means to be an American after 9/11 and about how the nation is revamping the concept of citizenship. And it's an opportunity to reassess — yet again, the relationship between the United States and its neighbors to the south, a chance to reflect on the role of Hispanic culture in the English-speaking world. For those eager to understand the historical context behind these issues, I know of no more comprehensive, readable

source than J.H. Elliott's *Empires of the Atlantic World*. . . . A feast of insights." ª clan Stavans, *Washington Post Book World*"In a masterful account, Oxford don Elliott explores the simultaneous development of Spanish and English colonies in the so-called New World. . . . Elliott's synthesis represents some of the finest fruits of the study of the Atlantic World." ª Publishers Weekly"Elliott's mastery of Spanish materials is especially impressive and allows him to show how Spanish America 'was large enough to provide the setting for a variety of holy experiments'. . . . It is refreshing to read, towards the end of this brilliant, compelling book, that in the British colonies 'a distinctively, American identity' was not so much the cause of revolution as the result." ª Tom D'Evelyn, *Christian Science Monitor*"So skilled . . . that it continually generates fresh insights forged out of familiar materials. . . . This is an indispensable and richly rewarding contribution to both the art of comparative history and the story of early America." ª Richard R. Johnson, *The Journal of American History*"Elliott has been writing about 'the old conundrum of the decline of Spain' with increasing skepticism since 1961, and his new *Empires of the Atlantic World* is in many ways the culmination of a lifetime's exploration of the riddle." ª Matthew Restall, *William and Mary Quarterly*"An essential addition to scholarship on the broader impact of imperialism in the Atlantic World." ª K. David Milobar, *History News Network*"A magisterial comparison of the Spanish and British empires in the Americas. . . . This story only hints at the scope and richness of Elliott's masterful comparative history." ª Richard J. Ross, *Law and History Review*"Insightful and illuminating. . . . Rich and delightful. . . . Complete with wonderful illustrations that are well integrated into the discussion." ª clan K. Steele, *American Historical Review*"This book amazes. Covering the span of the imperial experience in the Americas, its combination of erudition and depth of insight is rarely matched. . . . The book will prove to be a magnum opus" ª thorough, thought-provoking, definitive." ª William J. McCarthy, *Nautical Research Journal*"Evocative. . . . From his very first chapter, Elliott does wonderful work in breaking down oversimplified characterizations of the Spanish empire as one of 'conquest' and Britain's one of 'commerce'. . . . Elliott is to be applauded and thanked, not only for his perseverance in writing this much-needed comparative review, but also for the verve and vision with which he infuses his smooth and insightful narrative." ª Kristen Block, *Itinerario*"J.H. Elliott's comparative study of English and Spanish colonization in the Americas is a sweeping synthesis that contributes significantly to our understanding of how European empires rose and fell from the sixteenth century to the early nineteenth." ª Aaron Spencer Fogleman, *New West Indian Guide*"Others have offered comparisons between the English- and Spanish-speaking worlds, but

none have been as fully nuanced or fully realized as this. A masterpiece by one of the English-speaking world's most accomplished historians." •David Weber, author of *Bitterbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment*" Elliott's close study of the empire the English founded in North America and the one that the Spanish built to the south has given him remarkable insights and perspectives. The result is to give new dimensions to the usable past of both Americas." •Edmund S. Morgan, author of *Benjamin Franklin*

I am an American born in the United States, but have lived in Ecuador for over 50 years. Discovering the reasons for which Latin America has had so much difficulty managing its democratic systems has been among my principal reading objectives for many years. John Elliott has done a great job of answering my questions. He demonstrates that accumulated circumstances are stronger than past culture in making the difference. Or, in some sense, he states that the circumstances eventually have a great deal to do with the creation of a culture. This well documented, cause and effect historical analysis of the origins of the differences between Spanish American culture and British American culture is well worth reading.

Elliot covers the colonial adventures and misadventures of the two dominant European powers in the western hemisphere, England and Spain, in the three hundred years following Columbus' landing. Upon her arrival, Spain's western possessions were populated by vast pools of indigenous peoples, where intermingling between the new arrivals and domestic peoples became commonplace, resulting, as it did, in a growing number of Creoles (individuals of mixed Indian/Spanish blood). Conversely New Englanders, for the most part, remained congregated in their Protestant clusters, ideologically and socially segregated from their native cousins. At first blush, economic fortunes seemingly shone well on Spain, where a mother load of Peruvian silver, which, in spite of strict mercantile controls by the mother country, fueled a cultural colonial renaissance and resultant growth in universities, cathedrals, and regal cities far larger and exquisite than anything in Massachusetts or Maryland. Silver's blessing, however, also created a false-sense of Spanish invincibility; and it didn't take long for the conquerors to find themselves hard pressed scraping together the necessary resources to police such a vast and increasingly threatened empire. The English, in achieving supremacy over the seas, provided the American colonialists a cushion from outside interference which allowed them the sort of freedom to explore and develop hitherto unknown pluralistic political associations; yet while the English melting pot provided the experimental grounds to reconcile Euro-American inter-cultural and religious conflagrations, it was

far less altruistic and tolerant and respectful toward its indigenous neighbors. Ironic as it sounds, one can easily make the case that the more regimented and Spanish regal/clerical hierarchy did far more than its European rival in giving voice to her native peoples. It is interesting to see how the French, both directly and indirectly, thwarted both Spanish and English hegemony. In the case of the Brits, it was the costs of underwriting the French and Indian War and the mother country's subsequent attempt to have their colonies pay for that war which provided a key stimulus to the American Revolution. Spain's demise arrived more slowly and subtly; Napoleon's Iberian Peninsula adventures in the early 1800s estranged Spain from her American colonies, creating in the process political independence in the form of Simone Bolivar.

This book is more about the empire-building practices exhibited by the British and the Spanish in their American colonies, than about the reasons behind the two empires of the Atlantic. This book provides a great panoramic view of how it was done. It is weaker in telling you why it was done. Sporadically the author chooses to get into some of the reasons, but he is inconsistent and inconclusive. When the British crown chartered the Virginia Company, what were they trying to achieve? Was this a British government effort or was this a private initiative? When the Spanish discovered that these were not the Indies, why did they continue to finance the exploration and settlement in America? Was conquest of the unknown a plan B or was this the logical solution to finance the war against the Muslims in the Mediterranean? The author calls the Spanish Empire an empire of conquest and the British Empire an empire of commerce. I did not like this labeling. Both European nations acquired and occupied territories in the New World. The fact that the Spaniards did it by force and the British in a less aggressive way (initially) by occupying "vacant" territories does not mean that it was not conquering. I feel that conquest is a foreign policy and commerce economic policy, and therefore we are comparing apples and oranges. I would have preferred a contrast between the Spanish centralized monopoly and the British decentralized oligopoly on the economic, and the British Constitutional Monarchy vs the Spanish Absolutist Monarchy on the foreign & government policy aspect. As the Spanish 100 years before them, the British chose to have an empire paid for by their own colonies. A self-sustained operation that turned out to be neither an empire nor self-sustained. Again! Why? Author gives us a scholarly work that is not easy reading (no chronological sequence), but it is a must read for people interested in reading about the arrival of the European civilization in the New World. Of the three sections in the book (Occupation, Consolidation and Emancipation) I felt Emancipation was easier to read and better organized. I especially enjoyed Elliot's work.

very perceptive review of the legal basis behind (and in some cases ahead) the action on the ground. He made me realize that the reasons behind historical events are better found in Treaties, rather than in the historical events stories.

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