The First English Settlements
In 1607, English settlers founded Jamestown in present-day Virginia. The colonists did not know how to farm. Many died of disease or hunger. The climate and soil were good for growing tobacco. This cash crop helped the settlers create a permanent settlement. The colony sold tobacco to buy food and supplies. In 1620, Puritans came to present-day Massachusetts on a ship called the Mayflower. They wanted to worship freely. Many died of hunger the first winter. Later, an American Indian named Squanto taught them to raise crops, hunt, and fish.

Three Regions
In the 1600s, new colonists settled in three regions: New England, the Middle Colonies, and the Southern Colonies. In New England, Puritans started the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Some people did not like its religious laws. They started other colonies. Most colonists grew only enough crops to survive. Because the region was close to the ocean, many New England colonists earned a living by fishing, shipbuilding, or trading. The Middle Colonies were settlements that spread south and west of New England. The climate and soil were good, and many colonists earned a living by farming. William Penn was the proprietor of Pennsylvania, where religious tolerance was practiced. In the South, new colonies started near Virginia. In the Southern Colonies, the climate was good for growing crops on farms and plantations.

The Beginnings of Democracy
The Virginia House of Burgesses was the first representative government in the colonies. In Massachusetts, colonists signed the Mayflower Compact, the first written plan for self-government in North America. Representative governments were not fair to everyone. Women, enslaved Africans, and poor men could not vote.