Civilization 4 - Colonization Strategy Guide

Chapter 1

What is my Motivation to do this:

I'm a bit frustrated that so many people seem to hate the game. I think its great despite the small flaws that will have to be fixed in an upcoming patch. However the game is already very much fun and completely playable and most of the so called bugs, imbalances, broken concepts etc. result of severe misunderstandings of the game concepts.

Well now I think saying to these people :'Just play better !' is a bit rude. Not everybody is an expert and there is nothing wrong with it. A casual gamer should have a decent chance to win at least on the lower difficulty settings. So I think some people might well appreciate this effort and I will be getting less frustrated on how the majority of the players gets almost everything wrong. Since I'm not totally familiar with all concepts yet myself, I will update this on a regular base getting to the finer points later on and starting with what I think are the most severe errors keeping some of you from having fun.

Chapter 1 : The most common misunderstandings of important game concepts

- The Liberty Bells REF Myth :

As for those of you who don't know what the REF is - its the expedition force of the King who will go for you when you declare Independence. Now how is this related to liberty bells. Every time you produce liberty bells the King will eventually expand his REF. As far as I know (might be not 100% accurate because its nowhere explained officially) there
are two factors which will have influence on the Kings decision to expand his REF. First is the absolute liberty bells you produce, that means there is a threshold and if you go above it the REF will expand and the threshold will be set to some higher amount. The second factor is what amount of bells you are producing per turn, that means the AI checks per round on how many bells you produce and related on how many that is the REF will eventually expand.

*Now the consequences on the game play are huge as you might figured out yourself however what exactly are the consequences :*

Lets focus on the absolute liberty bells amount thing first. Since you have to get 50% of your people root for Independence to be allowed declaring it you have to produce a given amount of liberty bells for each citizen no matter what. That means bigger is not necessarily better, if you have more towns and citizen the REF will be bigger as well. Thus you want to avoid building settlements in really crappy places, they don't help you that much but make your enemy stronger.

So why is this a good feature? You have much less disadvantages when playing a map with a lot of water where you cant build many settlements. Furthermore it allows for enormous strategic freedom since you don't need to go for some brute force strategy as it was in Col1.

Now lets come to the other aspect. Liberty bells per Turn cause the REF to expand. What does that mean for game play. Well if you produce liberty bells from the first turn on the REF will be bigger, that means you want to be really careful here. It is tempting to go for some fast founding father path but be aware that you have to make good use of the additional benefits to make it worth that the REF will be bigger later on.

That said for the beginning you should probably stay away for this at least for the first 50 turns and produce no liberty bells at all. You might think there is a problem with that because another Nation will capture some founding fathers you wanted to have. Luckily there is a way around this, you can produce political points in your settlements
- just switch from the building (e.g. docks) and look at the bottom there, you will find out how to do it.

- **Schools suck!**

Many people are getting pissed that schooling takes so long after you have trained a bunch of students. Well they are right, like in real life schools suck in this game (A+ for realism :P ). However there is more to it. You have to think of it as a countermeasure for players getting everything easily and make like dozens of farming cities shooting their population through the roof.
So what is the consequence of that? You cant train only so many students - huh I guess you figured out this yourself.

*But what exactly does it mean for your general approach on specialists that you can train only so many of them:*

You need to focus on schooling skills you cant get otherwise and which are really needed. So for Farmers and Fishers you generally have a bunch of native cities where you can train them. Use those instead of your schools.
The more sophisticated specialists are generally not needed in huge numbers (e.g. elder statesman, firebrand preachers). So to get them it is often enough to rely on what people you get at the European docks - of course that implies that you do build a bunch of Churches which you should most often.
So what is left on the list are those kind of specialist that you need many of and cant get cheaply otherwise. Lets think about what this is.
Master carpenters: An absolute must to have a lot of them, they are needed for making buildings, wagon trains, political points, cannons, ships and what not.
Master Blacksmith: Again tools are needed for many buildings, to make Muskets and Cannons - so you really need a bunch of them.
That said you want to go for those and eventually expand on related things like expert ore minors or expert lumber jacks if you cant get them cheap otherwise.
How can the natives be my friend, they always start surprise attacks on me:

Well it depends, the different natives tend to behave very differently. So on what should you be aware off. Montezuma and Huyana Capac are real pests like you might already experienced in Civ4. However here comes the good news, its more profitable to run them over because you get extra gold when you capture their cities. For your game style this means get rid of them rather sooner then later, you might want to wait a bit if they offer good training possibilities for your workers and other tribes don't have these skills available.

Some tribes have the 'Mentor' ability which means you can train people there a lot faster. This is a huge advantage because it will take pressure of your school system, so in general you want to keep those kind of natives and don't piss them of.

I found what is extremely bad for relationships between you and some Indian tribe is if you steal their food (even if you pay on settling). So if you want to keep this tribe don't use their food resources at all.

What you can further do to strengthen relationships with natives is to trade with them, I guess it doesn't have to be a whole lot of things you trade to them but if you do trade at least some goods with them your relationship will be getting better over time eventually.

The I can fight the Kings forces only in the open Myth:

Many people claim that you have to retreat out of your cities and let the King capture them. After that you counterattack the troops. Well I guess that impression comes from the very strong artillery the Kings has. If you wouldn't know yet those artillery has a huge Bonus when attacking cities.

However it turns out that this logic is totally flawed. The first thing is you can take major influence by what units you build on the composition of the Kings forces. The second thing is some spots are better for defending than others.
So what should you do if you plan for a defensive war against the King:

First thing is that you have to use some key spot where his troops need to go along and found a settlement with good defensive protectives there. Good for defensive is if you can build behind a river or on a hill and that's exactly what you should do if you plan to fight defensive.
The second thing is you obviously don't want the King to have many artillery because your defense against those in cities is rather bad regardless how good your city spot is.
It turns out that the King tends to build the counter unit on what you have the most excessively. So what you can do is for example build cannons only and don't much else and the King will react by building many mounted units. That doesn't mean you have to fight with cannons vs Cav however since you can recruit a decent amount of soldiers after you declared Independence.
Another aspect are the founding fathers, you want to get those which are useful in the context, that is for example the guy who gives +25% defense for all cities. Another good one is the one who gives you free unit promotions for city defense.

Chapter 2 : Getting started

Choosing your leader:

You might want to choose a leader that makes your life easier here. I think for the first games you want to go for someone who has many options available so that you are more free on which path you will go in the game. If you don’t have a favourite already I advocate taking George Washington. The combined bonuses for economy (getting more people) and military (getting cheaper soldiers) makes him very flexible in almost all game situations.
Now that you have chosen your leader you will find yourself on the main map and a ship with some soldiers and pioneers loaded at the beginning so what are you gonna do now. You need to have a look at the marked ocean part which lets you sail to Europe first. If that section is not symmetrical it is because there is no land in one direction and you want to make sure that you aren’t going that way. So if more parts of the marked Ocean area are lying to the North you want to go South West and vice-versa.

**Foundation of the first settlement:**

For your prospects the place where you settle takes quite a bit of influence so you should think this through carefully. If you have played Civ1 then you might noticed that settle on the first tile of land you see was a pretty good strategy in those times since you had to play a brute force approach and loosing turns by sailing around was not appropriate, let me tell you this Civ4Col is totally different! The placing of your cities is very important here. Even more since you cant disband them. So if land comes insight and the place seems rather ugly don’t settle there, you can afford some turns to find a better place. If you are in the very north or south of the map go ahead and sail a bit towards the middle, the reason behind this is that at the poles there is most likely way too much Tundra to get decent places for settlements. If you hit a small island don’t bother to settle there its absolutely not worth it.

So how does a good place to settle look like. Food is most important, you should either have at least one tile of fish/crab or wheat. If you find a river thats fine also since river fields have a bonus on food production. Furthermore a location that is not located on a hill is far superior for your starting city because the ore you get from your main city tile on a hill city is quite useless while getting something like cotton for free is much more interesting. As far as concerning other resources you might take whatever you can get, however for your first city a good location for growth should be the priority.

One thing you should take into account is that natives let you settle for
free with your first settlement. Thus you can settle right next to them if that’s the only decent location you can find. However be aware that you might need to destroy those natives later if you settle very close. If that’s not your game plane (e.g. you play as the French) then you might want to reconsider.

After you have placed your first settlement:

What you should do now is to explore the new world quite fast. This has some major advantages. You can get a basic game plan very early if you know what you have to deal with. The Native villages often give you some gold if you visit them - that is if no other nation has visited them yet. So this is kind of a race and you don’t want to be the looser here.
You might get lucky and visit a nearby Indian settlement which offers farmers or Fishers that’s of course pretty nice if you have wheat or fish respectively available.
So for your first visit with your ship in Europe you should make sure you can get either a specialist scout or 50 Horses. That means you have to sell tools or muskets if the price is 2/3 and no scout is available. That said you should make sure what the price for horses is before you sail back to Europe. Note that you can trade with coastal native villages which offer often very good prices for selling tools/muskets or buying things like cotton or tobacco. You do that buy Sailing with your ship onto the village square and press the trade button.
However I don’t recommend selling your muskets to the natives in general that might very well backfire on you.
While scouting be aware of the difference between Ancient ruins and burial grounds, if you go for burial grounds that might make the natives angry and you don’t want to ruin your relations with them from start in general, so go for the ruins and leave the burial grounds alone for now.

Meeting the other nations early:

If the AIs settle very close to you things are a little bit odd. For the
beginning I would say just start a new game if the situation is too absurd rather than fighting them down which is the other viable option. You don’t need to fear that you loose though if you prepare the assault well because the AIs seem to be tremendously week at that point.
What you can do to get less annoyed by them is catching their ship in the harbour - it will be destroyed and it will take a while until they get a new ship.

Chapter 3 : The early game

Population growth :

So now we have build our first settlement scouted a decent bit and have made some money by exploring and selling some goods in Europe. What are the next steps. Priority now should be population growth. There are different ways to achieve this. If you have a starting city with more than one special food resource you might want to train some farmers/fishers at the natives. With specialists on the food tiles cities will grow very fast. Another option is to build a church early on, that is especially valuable if you have a preacher specialist available. The advantage of this method is that you get more specialist early on and will have less problems with schooling your people later in general. A third approach is to establish some missions early on, obviously this is pretty good if you play either the french or are lucky enough to have some Jesuit missionary available. Another more evil approach is to attack enemy euro nations nearby and steal their population. If you have Inca or Aztec beside you can use this with Indians also because some of there settlements will give you a converted native after being destroyed, this tactic is especially good when playing Spain because you start with a veteran soldier, you get more treasures from destroying native villages and in the case of Juan de San Martin your Units will promote faster. So you have some decent options available here make sure you use at least one of them.

Getting a game plan :
The next step should be to look at your continent a bit closer, which are the places I want to build cities on - are they occupied by natives? So at first you should go for those sites that are very good, e.g. river with some special resources and hills/mountain. Preferably those spots are not that close to a native village. Of course those sites are pretty rare, now you need to get some idea on how you want to play. Are too many good spots occupied by native villages - than its maybe time to get some military rolling. Are enough spots available for free? Than it might be time to get some trade going with the Indians and strengthen your relations with them. Regardless on what you do you should have a plan on how to play in general relatively early even more so you have to choose some founding fathers very early. If you choose the wrong FFs for a strategy that turns out to be not your favourite later anymore you might be somewhat doomed.

So the founding fathers are pretty important for which should you go?

In general you want to be flexible here, different conditions require different founding fathers. For example the guy who gives 3 Jesuit missioners seems pretty poor in general however when playing the French he might actually pretty useful. I think many people are way too locked in what they tend to go for, e.g. always Peter Minuit. This is not how you play successful in a game that needs a lot of adaption every time you play it. However there is one exception to this, political founding fathers are kind of less valuable in the beginning because your bottleneck will almost always be political points. So the price for the other categories is relatively compared way cheaper. Of course there might be situations where you want to get one of those early on anyway but in general you should root for the other categories first.

Getting the ball rolling on specialist training at the native villages:

So now that you have a basic idea on what you want to do its time to make use of the Indian settlement train possibilities for your people. The earlier you start with it the better it is because the rate at which your people learn from the natives will slow down after
you have trained several in the same native village. As already said the Native 'Mentor' ability is your friend here. Native settlements with 'mentor' and a skill that is needed a lot like fishing,farming,mining is worth a lot here. If a skill is not available in the closer location you might want to start an expedition to sail for some far away natives and start some training there. The point why this native training is so important is that it takes pressure from your schools away which will make those much more effective.

Infrastructure :

As for schools you should probably thinking of getting one and train some Master Carpenters to get buildings up fast everywhere. To get your infrastructure going you might want to get a Hardy Pioneer now if you don’t already have one and build some streets so that the goods produced in your inland villages can easier be transported in Wagon trains to your coastal cities. That said tile improvement is way less important than in Civ4 where it had such an enormous effect.

Chapter 4 : Economy

Its always nice to have money so how can you maximize your profits now that you have some decent sized cities. There are two key concepts, first is you should specialize your cities a bit, it doesn’t make much sense to make everything everywhere. So if you got a city with two special cotton tiles make this your cloth factory. In order to do this get the appropriate buildings which enhance the production and make sure that you have specialist working everywhere.

The second important concept here is to have a little diversification, 3 Cigar producing cities will get less effective after a while because the prices will eventually start to fall on the European market, that said with Dutch leaders you got some additional possibilities here. However if you aren't playing for the Dutch try to have one producing city for each Rum,Cigars,Cloth and Coats instead of having many for one of these goods. Often this wont be possible but you don't really have to bother that much. You need only so much money to get things starting
as soon as your colonies are getting more independent you don’t need
as much money anymore. If you are lucky enough to get some silver
mining opportunity, that’s nice and should be used. Note that native
worker bonus for silver mining is quite huge so if you got no expert
silver miner available you should assign a native there if possible.
As you can see in the comments below some people disagree on how
to set this up best and they have some valid points. The important
thing is another one though, do have a plan on where you produce
what and don’t produce everything everywhere.

What can you do further to enhance cash - get Peter Minuit as
Founding Father. Things at the European docks will be way cheaper to
buy with him in your congress so if you plan to use trade extensively
you should get him. Note that you can make a decent profit trading
with the natives also, this has the further advantage that relations with
them are getting better over time.

All in all you generally should not focus too much on trade only,
eglecting to build cities which will become your musket/artillery
Factories is a major mistake if you aren’t on some special strategy.
So if you have the choice between getting a decent city for making
trade goods and getting a city for producing weapons you should
almost always go for improving your military power, that is if
you already have some places where you are producing goods.

**Chapter 5 : Preparing for Independence**

After settling your continent and improving your cities a bit it will be
time to start preparing for Independence. To declare Independence
you need to have 50% of your population rooting for it. However be
aware that all your soldiers count as king loyalists. So now its time
to start producing a decent amount of liberty bells in your cities.
You should stop population growth a bit at this time because each
new born citizen will be a royalist as well, so if you keep getting
too much new citizens you will be slowed down pretty hard in going
for Independence. The Error many people often make here is to
not stop population growth and assign new citizens to their army
- don’t do this it will take you for ever to get the 50% like this.

*So what are good ways to get liberty bell production going?*

Some specialist will help here no doubt, so if you haven’t a few elder statesman available yet you probably should buy at least 2 or 3 in Europe. Buildings help a lot also, you should make sure that you are building printing press and Newspaper at least in your bigger cities. Now it might be a good time to look for some founding father who improves liberty bells production, you will find most of those in the political area of the FF screen. Well now you have done all this but still struggle, don’t despair there are still ways to help you here. You might consider disbanding some of your non loyal citizens like for example pioneers if you have improved your land a decent bit already, if that doesn’t help enough look for your cities with low rebel sentiment and disband some citizens there.

*Preparing for the assault:*

The rebel sentiment in your cities is growing now, however are you prepared to fight yet - make sure you have at least one city that is specialised on musket/artillery production. Those kind of cities should not be at the east cost because its pretty hard to defend those cities. The reason for this is that the Kings Fleet is pretty strong and it will bombard your coastal cities. Thus you should be prepared on giving up those cities at least for some time, the place you want to put up the fight is somewhere inland preferably on terrain that gives you bonuses like hills, mountains and forests.

So back to preparing for that war, since horses are relatively cheap to buy you don’t really have to bother much breeding them yourself unless you get lucky and get some expert rangers for free. That means you want to have a decent amount of storage capacity for both your horses and your muskets. building some warehouses helps here, furthermore you should build some additional wagon trains if you don’t have many yet to increase storage capacity.

By now you should have a plan where and how to fight the kings forces, if you want to fight in the open get a lot of horses and don’t
bother with getting soldiers too much, Dragoons are much better in the open in general. If you want to fight more defensive make sure you get some infantry to defend.

**Chapter 6 : The Independence war**

Well I think I don’t want to go into more detail as I already did in the above here because that might steel the fun for you on developing strategies on how to beat that pesky King the most effective. Just a few words which troops are good in general for what purpose.  
Soldiers : Defending Cities  
Dragoons : Fighting in the open  
Cannons : Attacking Cities

I hope you can enjoy the game now as much as I do 😊