

Section 1: Europeans Set Sail

SKILLED VIKING SAILORS

The Vikings were the first Europeans to make contact with North America. They were skilled sailors who developed a new style of ship that was more stable on rough seas.

In the year 1000, **Leif Eriksson**, the son of Erik the Red, set off for Greenland. Strong winds blew his ship off course, and he landed on the North American coast. The Vikings settled in a coastal area that Eriksson called Vinland, but they left after a few years. Europeans did not return to the continent for centuries.

PRINCE HENRY THE NAVIGATOR

In the early 1400s Portugal became a leader in world exploration. Although he never set out on a voyage himself, Prince **Henry the Navigator** helped Portugal's explorers succeed. He built an observatory and a school of navigation to teach better methods of sailing. Europeans had several reasons to explore the world. They wanted spices from Asia, and they wanted to learn more about Asia and its culture. They also wanted to convert Asians to the Christian faith.

European sailors were able to travel in open seas without landmarks to guide them because of new technology. The **astrolabe** was used to chart a ship's location based on the position of the stars. The **Caravel** was a new kind of ship that was smaller, lighter, and easier to steer. Caravels used triangular sails that allowed ships to sail against the wind and rudders that improved steering.

A SEA ROUTE TO ASIA

In the 1400s Portuguese sailors traveled south along the coast of Africa, setting up trading posts along the way. In 1497 a Portuguese expedition led by Vasco da Gama sailed around the southern tip of Africa and reached India. These successful voyages had a number of **effects**, both positive and negative. Portugal's wealth and power increased. However, these travels eventually led to the spread of the slave trade. Other European nations soon began looking for their own sea routes to Asia.

Section 2: Europeans Reach the Americas

COLUMBUS SAILS ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

Christopher Columbus, a sailor from Genoa, Italy, believed that he could reach Asia by sailing west across the Atlantic Ocean. He asked King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain to pay for an expedition. In return, he promised great riches, new territory, and Catholic converts.

Sailing with three ships, Columbus reached an island in the Bahamas in 1492. Columbus thought he had found a new route to Asia. In reality he had reached another continent that was unknown to him. Columbus made three more journeys to the Americas during his lifetime. When he died in 1506 he still believed that he had reached Asia.

The voyages of Columbus changed the way Europeans saw the world and also created conflict between European nations. In 1493 the pope issued a decree that created the **Line of Demarcation**. This imaginary boundary divided the Atlantic Ocean between Spain and Portugal. The Portuguese king believed the arrangement favored Spain, so the leaders of the two nations signed the **Treaty of Tordesillas**. This treaty moved the Line of Demarcation 800 miles further west and prevented a war between the two countries.

OTHER EXPLORERS SAIL TO THE AMERICAS

After Columbus other explorers sailed across the Atlantic Ocean. In 1501 Amerigo Vespucci became convinced that he had not reached Asia but had discovered a “new world.” A German mapmaker labeled the continents across the ocean as *America* in his honor.

Vasco Núñez de Balboa, a Spanish explorer, crossed the jungles of Central America to see the Pacific Ocean in 1513. In 1519 Portuguese navigator **Ferdinand Magellan** sailed around the southern tip of South America and into the Pacific. Although Magellan was killed in the Philippine Islands, one ship from his expedition was the first to **circumnavigate**, or go all the way around, the globe.

European explorers and settlers took plants and animals with them to America and brought back American plants and animals. This transfer was called the **Columbian Exchange** because it started with the explorations of Columbus. Over time a trading pattern developed, involving the exchange of raw materials, manufactured products, and slaves among Europe, Africa, and the Americas.

Section 3: Spain Builds an Empire

SPANISH CONQUISTADORS

The Spanish sent **conquistadors** to the Americas on military expeditions. Conquistador **Hernán Cortés** went to present-day Mexico in 1519. He had heard of land to the west ruled by **Moctezuma II**, the king of the Aztec empire. The Spaniards believed the Aztec lands were a rich source of gold and silver. They also wanted to convert the Aztec to Christianity.

Although they were greatly outnumbered, the conquistadors had superior weapons and formed alliances with enemies of the Aztec. Cortés took control of the Aztec capital and killed Moctezuma. Smallpox and other European diseases sped up the fall of the Aztec empire.

While seeking gold, **Francisco Pizarro** led his troops to capture the great Inca capital at Cuzco. Within a few years Pizarro had conquered the entire Inca empire. The Spanish then began to create a vast empire which they called New Spain. They established settlements to serve as trading posts, missions to convert local Native Americans to Catholicism, and military bases.

EXPLORING THE BORDERLANDS OF NEW SPAIN

Spain’s empire in America extended well beyond the lands taken from the Aztec and Inca. Regions claimed by the Spanish explorers included the island of Puerto Rico, the coast of present-day Florida, and the coastal regions of the Gulf of Mexico. The Spanish also explored what is now the southwestern United States, looking for cities of gold that were rumored to exist there. They traveled through unclaimed areas of Texas, Oklahoma, and as far north as Kansas.

SPANISH TREATMENT OF NATIVE AMERICANS

California was among the last borderlands settled by the Spanish. To pay back settlers for their work, Spain established the **encomienda system**. It gave settlers the right to tax Native Americans and make them work. Most of the workers were treated as slaves and forced to work on **plantations** in New Spain. Many Native Americans died of disease and exhaustion. The priest **Bartolomé de Las Casas** spoke out against the terrible treatment of Native Americans.

Section 4: The Race for Empires

EVENTS IN EUROPE

In 1517 a priest named Martin Luther launched the **Protestant Reformation**. His followers were called **Protestants**. Luther said the Catholic Church was too rich and abused its powers. The

printing press helped spread Protestant ideas because large numbers of Bibles could be printed. More people could read the Bible on their own instead of depending on priests to explain it.

Often conflicts between Catholics and Protestants led to war. In the late 1500s French Catholics fought French Protestants known as Huguenots. Many Huguenots traveled to the Americas for religious freedom. In 1534 King Henry VIII established the Church of England, or Anglican Church. Henry declared himself head of this Protestant church. By breaking with the Catholic church, King Henry made himself the enemy of other European rulers who were Catholics.

King Philip II of Spain, a Catholic ruler, put together a large fleet called the **Spanish Armada** to defeat the Protestant nation of England. England had fewer ships, but they were quick. In July 1588 the English navy defeated the Armada. The defeat hurt the Spanish, whose economy was in trouble because of inflation. Inflation is a rise in prices caused by an increase in the amount of money in use.

SEARCH FOR A NORTHWEST PASSAGE

European nations wanted to find a **Northwest Passage** in North America that would allow ships to sail from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Early searches explored the coast from Canada to North Carolina. **Jacques Cartier** explored the Saint Lawrence River and claimed lands for France. The Northwest Passage was not found, but the voyages led to more interest in North America.

EUROPEAN PRESENCE IN NORTH AMERICA

Spain and Portugal claimed much of South and Central America but left most of North America unexplored. In the late 1500s Sir Walter Raleigh of England received a **charter** to found a colony in present-day Virginia. The first colonists did not stay, but Raleigh sent more colonists. Those colonists disappeared.

France built settlements in Florida, but the Spanish soon drove them out. In the 1600s, French colonies were established on the Saint Lawrence River. The French claimed lands extending to the Mississippi River. The Dutch founded the town of New Amsterdam on Manhattan Island. Swedish settlers started New Sweden along the Delaware River, but it was conquered by the Dutch colonists in 1655.

Section 5: Beginnings of Slavery in the Americas

THE NEED FOR A NEW LABOR FORCE

Diseases like measles, smallpox, and typhus had afflicted Europeans for many centuries before they came to the New World. As a result, Europeans were more **immune** to the diseases than Native Americans who had never been exposed to them at all. Therefore, these European diseases had a devastating effect on the Native American population. Millions died in the years after Columbus reached the New World.

Now the European colonists needed a new workforce for their plantations. As Africans had already developed some immunity to European diseases, the colonists decided that slaves from West Africa could be the solution to the labor problem.

THE SLAVE TRADE

In 1510 the Spanish government legalized the sale of slaves in its colonies. Over the next century, more than a million African slaves were brought to the Spanish and Portuguese colonies. The English and Dutch were also active slave traders.

Enslaved people were often captured in the interior of Africa, chained, and forced to march up to 1,000 miles to the coast. They were then chained together and packed as cargo in the lower decks of ships crossing the Atlantic Ocean. This voyage was known as the **Middle Passage**. In

the crowded ships, disease spread quickly. Many of the slaves died of sickness, suffocation, or malnutrition during the voyage.

Between the 1520s and the 1860s, about 12 million Africans were shipped across the Atlantic as slaves. The slave trade led to the **African Diaspora**. Slaves had few rights in the colonies and were considered to be property. The treatment of enslaved Africans varied, but severe treatment and dreadful punishments were often part of American slavery.

SLAVE CULTURE IN THE AMERICAS

Slaves in America came from many parts of Africa. They spoke different languages and had different cultural backgrounds, but they also shared many customs and viewpoints. They built a new culture on the things they had in common.

Families were a key part of slave culture, but slave families faced many challenges. A family was often broken apart when members were sold to different owners. Religion was a refuge for slaves. Slave religion was primarily Christian, but it also included traditional elements from African religions. Religion gave slaves a sense of self worth and hope for salvation. Slaves used songs and folktales to tell stories of sorrow, hope, agony, and joy.