



1450 to 1750 CE

AN Age of Discovery

Mr. RICHMOND'S Crazy Guide to World History

For thousands of years, the New World (North and South America) had really just been doing their own thing. Then all of a sudden... BAM! Everything changed. Why? What was it about that little voyage in "Fourteen-Hundred and Ninety-Two" that so changed the lands across the "Ocean Blue?" The answer isn't a simple one, but it's definitely important. Within just a few decades of Columbus's arrival in the New World, the Western Hemisphere would be barely recognizable. Massive European empires suddenly gobbled up the map while

native populations were brutally eliminated or depleted by Old World diseases. Things weren't a whole lot better in Africa, either, where European interests led to some of the worst systems of slavery in history. While this period would be an "Age of Discovery" for Europe, for the rest of the world, it meant the game had changed. Europe had discovered something alright... it's desire to rule the world.

UNIT 4



Student Notes:

WORLD: AN Age of Discovery

Unit 4.2: AN Age of Discovery

4.2.01



Important Stuff:

- What events prompted the European desire to find a new route to the East?
- What role did Henry the Navigator play in the Age of Discovery?
- What technologies helped contribute to a wave of exploration in the 1400's?

In the 15th and 16th centuries, major cultural changes were dramatically impacting Europe. As the ideas of the Renaissance and Reformation took root, they began to force Europe into far more modern methods of government, religion, and artistic expression. Yet these were not the only events to be seen in this period; by the close of the 1400's, nations such as Portugal and Spain had begun to lead the way in the exploration of the unknown regions of the globe, leading to an exciting and profitable period of discovery.

The Ottomans Become a Pain in Europe's Butt

Since the Crusades, Europe had worked to develop a powerful system of exchange with North Africa and the Middle East. As new ideas promoted wealth and trade, these systems of exchange only intensified across the Mediterranean region. Europe strongly desired luxury goods found only in the east — spices like ginger, pepper, and nutmeg were of particular interest — but often found themselves with little of their own goods to offer. The resulting **imbalance of trade** (where the value of imported goods outweighs those exported) cost dearly, draining Europe's supply of precious metals.

Matters were further complicated as the Ottoman Empire began to topple the Byzantine Empire by the end of the 14th century. A powerful Turkish state originally from Asia Minor, the Ottomans finally brought down Constantinople in **1453**. The Eastern Mediterranean was quickly established as a strong Muslim region, upsetting the often-xenophobic tendencies of the Christians in Europe. Most of the goods that Europeans desired originally hailed from regions like India and China, and land routes through the Ottomans appeared to be the only known means of reaching these destinations. With no alternatives, the Christians of Europe were begrudgingly forced to trade with their Muslim neighbors.

By the time of the Renaissance and Reformation, however, new ideas had begun to drastically re-shape the way that Europeans thought about the world. As many questioned beliefs and governments, others began to question the known borders of the map. Those gripped by a newfound quest for wealth and personal glory began to search for new resources or trade routes. By the mid-1400's, Europe — already beginning its Renaissance and soon to begin its Reformation — would begin an **Age of Discovery**, a period of heavy European exploration and global expansion.



See? THIS IS WHY We Need Google Earth...

The map above shows what Europe would have known about (in white) by the time of Columbus's first voyage. While much of Eurasia was known to Europeans, some portions — such as Siberia — had yet to be fully explored. Even much of Africa — except for the parts where Europeans regularly engaged in trade — were still unknown to Western Civilization. The Americas and Australia were completely unknown, though there is that possibility that the Vikings had discovered more than they knew...

Portuguese Discovery and Expansion

Leading this period of expansion was the tiny kingdom of Portugal on the Iberian Peninsula. Having finished its own period of *Reconquista* by **1300**, the Portuguese were quickly struck with the problem of their own geography. Bordered by the seemingly-endless Atlantic Ocean and the ever-growing power of the Spanish kingdoms, the Portuguese felt as though they had little room to grow and expand.

This attitude changed with the rise of **Prince Henry the Navigator**, the son of the Portuguese King, John I. Hearing stories of pirates and slave-traders from the African coast, Henry was fascinated by the idea of exploration. Later in life, he helped to finance numerous expeditions into the Atlantic, many of which proved exceedingly profitable for the Portuguese. With his financial backing, Portuguese expeditions discovered the Madeiran Islands off the African coast in **1418**. Once settled, the archipelago became an important launching point for future voyages. Another expedition discovered the Azores, another island chain, around **1430**.

OH History, you're SO Silly...

Tradition holds that Henry opened up a school for cartographers, navigators, and explorers meant to help fuel his desire for exploration. In reality, there's very little evidence to say this actually happened. His nickname of "The Navigator" wasn't even added until the late 1800's by a pair of British dudes. Another case where "legend" is remembered better than "fact..."

Many of these journeys could not have occurred without a host of technologies diffused from the east. For centuries, Europeans had slowly gathered the impressive tools used by mariners from China and the Indian Ocean trade routes. From

Arabian traders, the Europeans gained the astrolabe, a tool used to navigate and tell time using the night sky. From the Chinese, the Europeans acquired the sternpost rudder (used for steering ships) and the magnetic compass, which would prove invaluable for navigation. Portuguese ship-builders similarly began to re-use the lateen sail, a triangular-shaped sail that allowed a vessel to steer into the wind. The new Portuguese ships that employed them were known as cara-vels, and would help to spearhead the Age of Exploration.

Getting AROUND AFRICA

Under Henry the Navigator and other leaders, Portugal attempted to further explore the African continent. Knowing the kingdoms of West Africa were the source of much of Europe's gold supply, the Portuguese sought a means of circumventing (or going around) the land-based Trans-Saharan trade routes. For centuries, the furthest known point on the African coast was Cape Bojador in modern-day Western Sahara. Sailors feared that beyond that point were untold dangers or even the end of the world itself. Under Henry's leadership, the Portuguese traveled beyond this point and toward the West African kingdoms, allowing West African gold and slaves to be quickly imported into Portugal.

C'MON GUYS, IS IT REALLY THAT HARD?

Exploring wasn't just a matter of pointing your boat at one direction and going somewhere... It was often a matter of life and death. As far as most sailors were concerned, they were just as likely to be lost at sea or eaten by a sea monster as they were finding something new. Long-term or long-distance voyages were particularly dangerous; if your ship didn't have enough supplies or if you couldn't find a decent place to dock and resupply, you could quickly find yourself in some pretty big trouble (and dead).

But a new route to India and China continued to elude Western Europe, prompting further expeditions to the south. In **1488**, Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu

Dias finally rounded the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa and reached the waters of the Indian Ocean. This discovery was monumental for the kingdoms of Europe, who now realized there was finally an alternative to trading through Ottoman lands. A decade later in **1498**, another Portuguese sailor named Vasco da Gama reached India by Dias's route, becoming the first European to do so. Da Gama's success would pave the way for European trade with India, but also its later conquest of the region.

Spain BEGINS ITS AGE OF EXPLORATION

Spain — Portugal's closest and greatest rival — quickly saw the benefits of its neighbor's explorative endeavors. When the Spanish *Reconquista* ended in **1492**, Spain was quick to send out its own voyages of exploration. In that same year, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella sent out Christopher Columbus (Cristoforo Colombo), an Italian explorer under their patronage. Promising a route to India and China that would bypass the now-Portuguese routes around Africa, Columbus proposed travelling west into unknown waters and around the spherical Earth. Though not successful in reaching his destination, Columbus unknowingly discovered the Bahamas and the doorway to the Americas.

Wait, you mean they LIED to me in Kindergarten?

Columbus was not the hero we think he was. Remember all that crap you were told in kindergarten about Columbus trying to prove the world was round? Complete and utter nonsense. Anybody who knew anything in 1492 knew the world was a sphere. That had been settled by Gupta and Hellenistic thinkers a long, long time before. Those guys were so good, they even figured out that the world was pretty darn close to 25,000 miles in circumference, a number which we now know to be true. Columbus, on the other hand, had done his own "math" and concluded the world was more like 15,000 miles around (You know... Only 10,000 miles off, right?). His voyage was meant to prove the world was small... Not round. Don't worry, our love for Columbus will get even more warm and fuzzy in the next lesson...

Columbus's eventual discovery of a "New World" began an explosion of exploration. Immediately, Spain, Portugal, and even rivals like England and France began to send out dozens of explorers with the intent to find new lands and establish ports and colonies. In **1519**, the Spanish launched a daring voyage under Ferdinand Magellan to circumnavigate (sail around) the massive new globe that was suddenly being revealed. Though Magellan himself was killed on the voyage, his men proved successful. The world was far more massive and promising than anyone in Europe — or anywhere else — had dared to dream. In the coming years, the unknown regions of the world would be carefully revealed, leading to a time of global connectedness never before seen.



AMERICAS: CONTACT AND CONQUEST

Unit 4.2: AN AGE OF DISCOVERY

4.2.02



Important Stuff:

- What was the importance of the Treaty of Tordesillas, and what did it create?
- What was the importance of Conquistadors like Cortés and Pizarro?
- How did the Spanish treat native populations in the Americas? Why do you think this was?

The impact of the New World's European discovery was immediate and powerful. Though Columbus himself failed to realize the true importance of his discovery, others in Spain and the rest of Europe were eager to seize control of the vast new riches that lay beyond the Atlantic Ocean. Tiny trade outposts quickly grew to massive empires, with local populations bearing the brunt of European aggression.

The Treaty of Tordesillas

Columbus concluded his famous 1492 voyage in the early weeks of the following year. Returning with a wealth of gold and precious gems, he told tales of lush and beautiful landscapes and treasures beyond imagining. He also brought with them several of the local natives, who Columbus has been pleased to find agreeable to both trade with Europe and possible servitude. He was amazed at their generous and obedient spirit, two traits that would later prove to be disastrous for native populations across Europe.

"I gave to [the natives] some red caps, and to others glass beads, which they hung about their necks, and many other things of slight value, in which they took much pleasure...They all go quite naked as their mothers bore them. None of them are more than 30 years old, very well built, of very handsome bodies and very fine faces. They ought to be good servants and of good skill, for I see that they repeat very quickly whatever is said to them..."

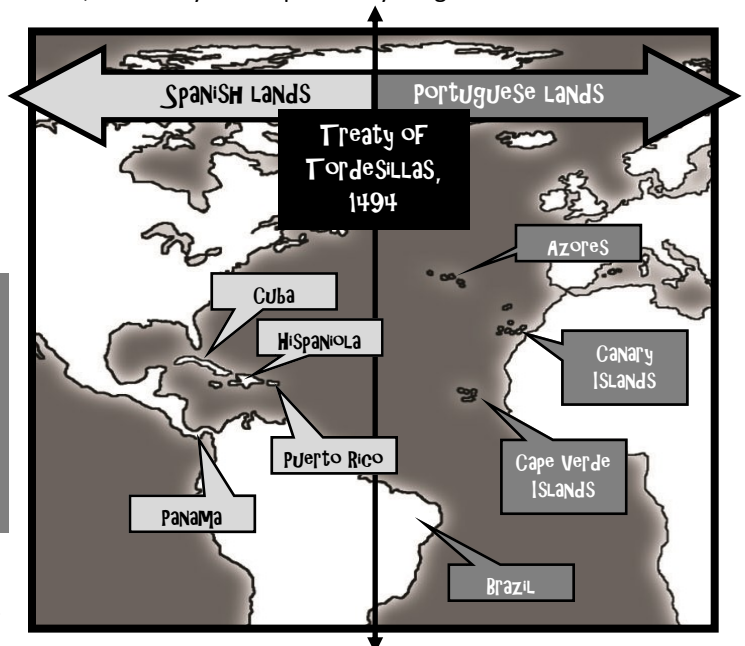
— CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain were happy to send Columbus on a second voyage in the later months of 1493. On this voyage, Columbus was able to discover the island of Dominica, the Virgin Islands, Cuba, and Jamaica. Of particular interest was the island of Hispaniola, a sizeable island today dominated by the countries of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In the coming years, the Spanish would begin to settle and establish the region, leading to the first Spanish colony of Santo Domingo in 1496.

Hey idiot... THIS IS WAY COOLER THAN YOU THINK...

Columbus went to his death continuing to believe that he'd discovered a faster way to the East Indies – the so-called "Spice Islands" of modern-day Southeast Asia. The fact that Native Americans are often still referred to as "Indians" (even though they're nowhere near India) is a remnant from this belief. He had no idea of what he'd discovered – or what he was about to cause. Columbus's discovery would mean disaster for native populations, who would quickly vanish through disease, war, and enslavement.

Though Portugal was primarily concerned with its routes around and outposts within Africa, it too was interested in the promise of new lands. Hoping to stem any future conflicts from the rivalry between Portugal and Spain, Pope Alexander VI helped to engineer the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494. This document effectively divided the discoveries outside of Europe between the two powers, creating clear zones of Spanish and Portuguese influence. Drawing the line west of the Cape Verde islands, Spain was permitted all lands to the West and Portugal all of the lands to the East. With limited understanding of the New World's geography, the line seemed balanced at the time. Portugal was permitted to keep its Atlantic islands and African holdings, while Spain could continue to develop its blossoming colonies in the Caribbean. As Spanish expeditions continued to discover more and more lands to the west, however, the treaty would prove anything but fair.



The treaty still allowed Portugal some access to the new world, leading to the discovery of Brazil in 1500. Discovered by Pedro Álvares Cabral, the region would eventually become the largest and most powerful of the Portuguese holdings in the New World. The sheer size of Brazil led Cabral to the conclusion that his discovery was not some minor island; he had discovered a new continent altogether.

The Conquistadors

By the early years of the 16th century, Spain had already begun to establish major colonies in Puerto Rico, Cuba, Panama, and the northernmost reaches of South America. But these regions were not uninhabited. For centuries, these

4.2.02: AMERICAS: Contact and Conquest

islands had been home to dozens of native groups. The response from these local peoples was mixed; while some resisted Spanish control, others traded and interacted willingly. In most cases, the Spanish were at best indifferent and at worst hostile to the natives, quickly enslaving or exterminating them.

ALIENS!

The Spanish appearance in the New World was pretty similar to what would happen if aliens showed up on earth. Imagine what would happen if beings from another planet suddenly showed up on earth. Governments would crumble. Religions would collapse. Everything we thought we knew would be called into question. Even if the aliens were friendly, it would still be nothing short of terrifying for those experiencing it. It was a very similar thing for the American peoples of the 1500's. "Take me to your leader?"

The arrival of the Spanish drastically upset the political and social order of many native regions. Militaristic Spanish explorers – often remembered as **Conquistadors**, or conquerors – frequently set sail in the hopes of establishing new colonies and sources of wealth. Legends of immense riches drew many from the Spanish outposts in the Caribbean to the more established regions on the continents. There, massive states like the Aztec and Incan Empires — as well as the far smaller Mayan city-states — were completely unaware of the threat the Spanish posed.

One of the most famous Spanish *conquistadors* was **Hernán Cortés**. In **1519**, despite the orders of his superiors in Cuba, Cortés led an expedition into Mexico after hearing of the impressive power and wealth of the Aztecs. Quickly conquering several coastal regions, Cortés began to push further inward toward Tenochtitlan. Aided by a young girl, **Mallinali** (often remembered as **Mallinche**), Cortés was able to communicate and ally himself with local tribes who had long been rivals of the Aztecs.



Though the Spanish numbered only around 500 soldiers, Cortés proved himself powerful enough to warrant a meeting with the Aztec emperor, **Moctezuma II**.

Finally in Tenochtitlan, Cortés captured the emperor and took control of the capital. When the Aztec rose up in rebellion, they were crushed by the superior firepower of the Spanish. The city of Tenochtitlan was destroyed and the Aztec Empire came to a dramatic halt in **1521**. The Spanish quickly gathered up the lands of both the Aztecs and the natives that had assisted them. Much of the modern-day region of Mexico quickly became a massive Spanish colony known as **New Spain**. Cortés would serve as its first Governor-General, and would return to Spain an exceedingly wealthy man.

That's one intense dude.

Hernán Cortés was a pretty bold guy. According to some sources, upon arriving in Mexico, he had his troops completely tear apart their own boats. It was Cortés's way of saying "suck it up... we're not going home until the job is done." Later, once he had taken hold of Tenochtitlan, he had his men bring the boats to Lake Texcoco and re-assemble them, giving him a powerful fleet... even on a land-locked lake. The real key to his success, though, was the fact that many of the Aztec were convinced that he was the long-awaited god Quetzacoatl, who many thought would someday return from across the sea. This belief — which Cortés never tried to deny — gave him a particularly powerful edge against both the Aztecs and their neighbors. His cover was finally blown, though, when he demanded the Aztecs stop their bloody sacrifices — which forced Cortés to just kill the emperor and destroy the city instead.

A similar fate struck the Incan Empire several years later. In 1502, a young conquistador named **Francisco Pizarro** arrived in the New World. The nephew of Cortés, Pizarro likewise dreamed of wealth and fame. In **1532**, Pizarro led an expedition of only 160 men into the heart of the Incan Empire. Bringing terrifying destruction wherever he went, Pizarro finally gained an audience with **Atahualpa**, the powerful Incan Emperor. With a brilliant display of cannon fire and cavalry, Atahualpa's men fled in fear, leaving their emperor behind. Though the Spanish held him hostage for a time, they ultimately executed the emperor. This was a devastating blow to the Incas, whose highly-centralized government failed to recover. By **1537**, Pizarro had taken his fight to the Incan capital, destroying the city of Cuzco. In a short time, the greatest empire of the Americas had been annihilated.

Yikes... Does evil just run in the family?

Pizarro was just as crazy (and heartless) as his uncle. After capturing Atahualpa, he told the Incas that if they filled one room of a nearby building with gold and another with silver, they would have their emperor safely returned. Honoring the importance of their emperor, the Incas complied, giving Pizarro the wealth he demanded. But even once the ransom was paid, Pizarro still had him executed. Real nice guy, you know?

Within a few short years, Spanish and Portuguese expansion into the New World had toppled the old order and begun a new direction for the region. In the decades to follow, European conquerors and settlers would continue their push into the Americas, dramatically reducing the size and influence of native populations.

AMERICAS: A New Spanish World

Unit 4.2: AN AGE OF DISCOVERY

4.2.03



Important Stuff:

- What factors contributed to the Spanish success against much larger and more powerful New World Empires?
- What was the role of the *encomienda* system in establishing Spanish control?
- Was the social hierarchy in the New World a racist institution? Explain.

In less than half a century, hot-headed Spanish *conquistadors* had eliminated the greatest civilizations of the Americas. With relatively minimal effort, a handful of Europeans had been able to overcome empires of millions. With no further resistance, the rest of Central and South America opened wide for future Spanish conquests. Almost immediately these regions fell under Spanish control, becoming the newest — and largest — regions of the ever-growing Spanish Empire. By the mid 1600's, Spain had gained a position as the undisputed master of the New World.

Why Spain Won

The fact that so few Spanish explorers were able to so easily topple the massive might of the Aztec and Incan Empires seems nothing short of remarkable. Still, this victory can easily make sense considering a number of political, technological, and even biological factors:

MASSIVE TECHNOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

By the 1500's, the Spanish had full use of steel armor, gunpowder-based muskets, and devastating cannons. The native Americans, by contrast, had no gunpowder and only minimal use of metallurgy. Weapons tended to be crafted from simple stone (usually obsidian) while armors were often cloth.

DOMESTICATION AND USE OF THE HORSE

Horses only evolved — and were therefore first domesticated in — Eurasia. The New World lacked any major pack animals with the exception of llamas. Horse-bound cavalry made for a fast and terrifying weapon against the Aztec and Incan armies who had no ability to counter them.

NATIVE INFORMATION AND ALLIANCES

Using the services of Malinalli and other natives, the Spanish were able to secure vital information to be used against their opponents. The Spanish were also able to rally together many competing tribes who, after years of dominance, had grown tired and resentful of Aztec and Incan control.

RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS AMONG THE AZTECS

Many among the Aztecs believed that Cortés was the embodiment of Quetzacoatl, the feathered serpent, and his light skin and technological abilities would have certainly made him appear divine. The Spanish arrival was therefore not only a social and political problem, it also became a serious theological one. How does one fight a god? And should a god be fought?

OLD WORLD DISEASES

Old World diseases ravaged the New World's populations (see next).

European diseases were easily the greatest factor in the Spanish success. As Europeans entered the New World, they brought with them a host of new diseases that local peoples had never before experienced. While centuries of coevolution had rendered Europeans largely immune to common Old World ailments, New World populations had no such defenses. As disease spread, native groups dwindled. What was once a population of roughly 35 million in 1492 was quickly depleted by as much as 90%, making the outbreak even more virulent than the Bubonic Plague of the 14th century. Though **smallpox** (a deadly virus which creates painful blisters across the body) was often the most deadly, influenza, typhus, measles, and many other diseases also made regular appearances.

BIOLOGICAL WARFARE

While diseases were more than capable of moving around on their own (in fact in many areas, populations were wiped out before Europeans even got there), some European groups opted to help speed it along. Throughout history, there are dozens of cases of Europeans (and quite commonly American after the American Revolution) deliberately spreading smallpox into native areas. A common and often-cited example involves the giving of smallpox-contaminated blankets to unsuspecting locals.

ENCOMIENDA AND REPARTIMIENTO

In "New Spain," the Spanish overseers were quick to establish new systems of political and social control. In the minds of many, the colonies existed primarily for the creation of wealth



for the king and people of Spain. In order to do this, new systems needed to be put into place to effectively govern both the lands and the people who lived upon them. In the broadest sense, the Spanish colonies were divided into two major regions. In the north, the lands of Central America were dominated by the Viceroyalty of New Spain while in the South, the Spanish ruled through the Viceroyalty of Peru. In both cases, a viceroy, or representative of the king, was established to act as a largely autonomous governor.

The "Land of Opportunity"

By the 1530's, thousands of Spanish settlers began to flock to the newly-held regions. Unlike the crowded and impoverished rural areas of Spain, the colonies were seen as a new opportunity. Here, even the previously-poor could obtain mines, large farms, and plantations. The difficulty, though, was in obtaining the necessary labor to work these industries.

As Spanish settlers developed these regions, new industries required significant labor, which most Spanish workers were unwilling to undertake. The solution to this problem came in the form of the encomienda system, which granted Spanish nationals the right to utilize native labor. By obtaining an encomienda, or grant from the Spanish crown, a landowner could effectively enslave and exploit the natives already living on his land. In many ways, this new system operated much like the system of manorialism of the European Middle Ages. In both cases, the development of a strong land-holding class brutally exploited the labor of land-bound serfs, with American haciendas, or Spanish plantations, operating much the same as a medieval manor.

Most Spanish landowners were nothing short of cruel to their native workers. It was commonplace for natives to be literally worked to death, while beatings and rapes were even more frequent. Such brutality was only compounded by the deadly diseases that were already ravaging native groups, leading widespread collapse of population.

Jesus Loves Me... I guess...

The Spanish believed that their presence in the New World was intended for something far greater. There was a deep-seeded belief that God had given the New World over to the Spanish as a way of blessing the natives with the gift of Christianity. There was a general idea among Spanish colonists that the physical abuse the natives were enduring would ultimately save their souls. "Love your neighbor" and all that, right?

The system was finally opposed by a Jesuit missionary named Bartolome de Las Casas. Later known as the "Protector of the Indians," Las Casas attempted to persuade Spanish landowners toward better native treatment. When his cries fell upon deaf ears, he wrote directly to the King (Emperor Charles V of both Spain and the Holy Roman Empire). Charles's response was far more productive; In 1542, he officially prohibited the enslavement of native peoples within the empire, officially ending the system.

But the vast distance between Spain and the colonies meant that change was slow in coming. Over time, the enco-

mienda system was replaced by the repartimento system, which improved conditions only slightly. Under these new stipulations, native workers still supplied the bulk of New World labor (especially on farms and valuable silver mines), but were limited in the amount of work they could be expected to carry out. Furthermore, they were expected to be compensated for their work with wages, though these were often questionable. Such new demands — in addition to the general decline in native numbers — caused many Spanish landowners to seek out new sources of labor. The result would ultimately be the beginnings of the African slave trade, which was still permitted under Spanish law.

A New Spanish Order

Culture in New Spain and Peru began to take on a distinctly European feel. Spanish began to establish itself as the dominant language, replacing more native dialects. Native beliefs were harshly persecuted by the Catholic Church, who arrived in force after — and in many cases alongside — the Spanish conquistadors. Monks and missionaries enthusiastically converted local populations to Catholicism, especially following the establishment of the Jesuit Order and the Council of Trent in the mid-1500's. Even today, the peoples of Central and South America continue to reflect a distinctly Catholic culture, the results of nearly five centuries of success.

Society, too, began to reflect the Spanish control of the time. As Spanish influence developed, a strict social hierarchy developed to favor them:

| CLASS | DESCRIPTION |
|------------------------------|---|
| PENINSULARES | Born in Spain (or Portugal), most power/influence in the system |
| CREOLES | Children of Peninsulares, born in New World (European ancestry) |
| MESTIZOS | Mixed European/Native ancestry |
| MULATTOES | Mixed African/Native ancestry |
| AFRICAN/NATIVE SLAVES | Lowest members of society |

Decline of Power...

Decline of Spanish Influence

Military and social success in the New World led Spain into a Golden Age by the beginning of the 16th century. Spanish ships carried vast sums of wealth across the Atlantic while the unknown borders of the New World continually expanded in their favor. Yet these victories masked a far less favorable situation in Europe, where Spanish influence was significantly less secure. After the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, Spain's position in Europe and the New World would be dealt a major blow, with it's influence beginning a steady decline in the coming centuries. Though it's political control of the Americas would finally fizzle out by the early 1800's, its cultural influence would continue on far longer.

AMERICAS: COLONIES OF NORTH AMERICA

Unit 4.2: AN AGE OF DISCOVERY

4.2.04



Important Stuff:

- How did the English experience with exploration differ from that of Spain?
- What was the relationship between France and native groups?
- Why might colonization be so important to the Dutch?

For some time, the Spanish and Portuguese attempted to prevent the exploration of the New World by other European powers. The involvement of other kingdoms would only further complicate the process of colonization and lead to a potential loss of profit for the already-established Iberian powers. Both Spain and Portugal made great efforts to classify their navigational charts and maps and even prevent the spread of essential seafaring technologies. These efforts delayed their rivals long enough to establish widespread control in Central and South America. When countries like England, France, and the Netherlands finally arrived on the scene, they had little left to explore but the seemingly-useless lands of North America.

In North America, **The Encounter** — the term often used to describe the meeting of the Old and New Worlds — played out in much the same way it did in Meso- and South America. Here, though, there were no great empires to be conquered. For the most part, native populations were organized into loose tribes. Many would be easily scattered by European colonists, but others would stand in resistance.

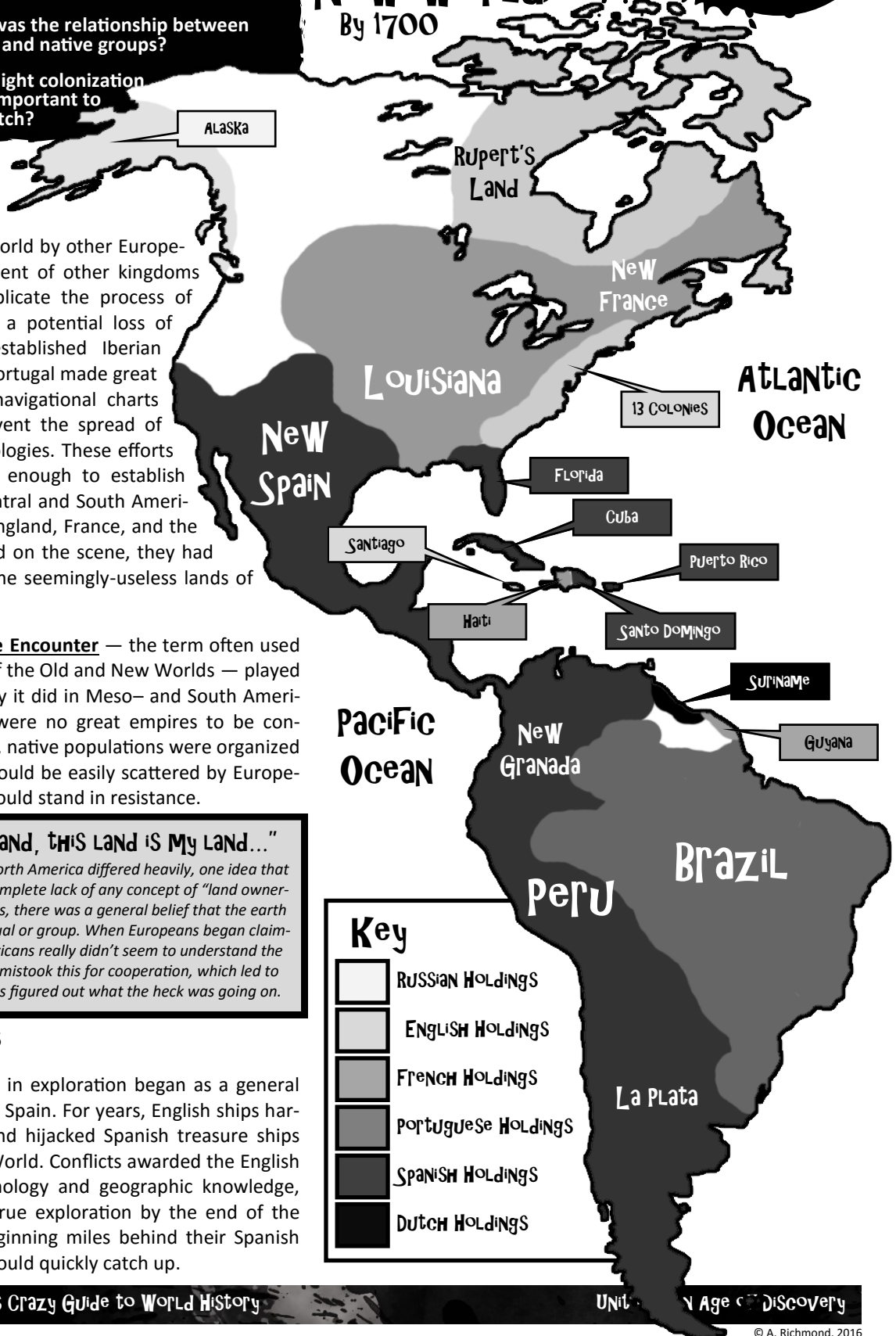
"THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND, THIS LAND IS MY LAND..."

Though the many cultures of North America differed heavily, one idea that was common to many was a complete lack of any concept of "land ownership." In many of these societies, there was a general belief that the earth belonged to all, not one individual or group. When Europeans began claiming tracts of land, Native Americans really didn't seem to understand the process. The Europeans often mistook this for cooperation, which led to many conflicts once the natives figured out what the heck was going on.

THE ENGLISH COLONIES

England's experiment in exploration began as a general rivalry with their nemesis, Spain. For years, English ships harassed Spanish colonies and hijacked Spanish treasure ships returning from the New World. Conflicts awarded the English with the necessary technology and geographic knowledge, allowing them to begin true exploration by the end of the 16th century. Though beginning miles behind their Spanish adversaries, the English would quickly catch up.

The New World By 1700



Key

- RUSSIAN HOLDINGS
- ENGLISH HOLDINGS
- FRENCH HOLDINGS
- PORTUGUESE HOLDINGS
- SPANISH HOLDINGS
- DUTCH HOLDINGS

Captain Cabot SOUNDS Like a breakfast cereal.

Some minor explorative expeditions did occur in the waning days of the 15th century, when England began to explore the northernmost regions of North America. Knowing the Spanish and Portuguese were busy settling and exploring the regions to the South, an English expedition — under **John Cabot** — sought a passage to India and China in colder waters, often remembered as the Northwest Passage (which was never found).

England's initial attempts at forming a colony in **Virginia** (so named for Elizabeth I, the "Virgin Queen") and North Carolina proved to be failures, but this would change. Under the authority of Elizabeth's successor, **James I** (r.1603-1625), the **Virginia Company** was founded in **1606**. As a joint-stock company, the Virginia Company acted much like a modern-day corporation with the idea of establishing North American colonies for commercial purposes. In **1607**, the Company established a settlement at **Jamestown** (now in Virginia). It would serve to be England's first North American colony. In the decades to come, England would establish a number of settlement sites throughout modern-day Canada and the United States. Most famous were the **Thirteen Colonies**, a collection of English-controlled regions along what is today the American East Coast.

Unlike the Spanish, the English had little interest in treasure-hunting and saw agriculture and trade as far more profitable ventures. Great effort was made to establish key **cash crops**, or agricultural products meant for trade, not food. Harvests of tobacco, cotton, and sugar were common, but depended heavily on the local climate and geography. Seeking a cheap and effective labor force, the English colonies frequently imported slaves — usually from Africa — to work their fields. Though some missionary work was carried out by the Anglican Church, this was never a colony's primary focus.

For the most part, the English colonists attempted to coexist with native populations, seeing them as valuable trading partners. Eventually, though, these relations were strained as natives realized the challenge to their traditional way of life. Though many conflicts occurred, a particularly famous incident occurred in Massachusetts colony with **King Philip's War** from **1675-1676**. Here, Wampanoag natives clashed with English colonists, yielding bloody revolts.

THE FRENCH COLONIES

The French, by contrast, were able to carry out one of the most successful relationships with native groups. In **1608**, **Samuel de Champlain** established the region of **Quebec** as the first French settlement in the New World. An elaborate system of trade developed between the French and local Algonquin and Huron tribes. As Native Americans brought furs to trade, the French would pay them in knives, tools, and guns. The French eventually learned to trap and survive in the wilderness for themselves, but a positive relationship continued to flourish. Large numbers of intermarriages took place between French settlers and local populations. Even

when Catholic missionaries were sent from Europe, clergy often became accustomed to local life, forcing conversion to become a secondary goal. Within a few decades, French influence had spread into Eastern Canada and deep into the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys.

Hey, it can't ALWAYS be Rainbows and Butterflies...

Though the French got along well with Algonquin and Huron tribes, they were despised by the Iroquois (more appropriately known as the Haudenosaunee, and found in what is today New York State). Sworn enemies of the Algonquin, the Iroquois' hatred for the French would be a key British tool in the later French and Indian War, the North American front of the far larger Seven Years War (1754-1763) raging across the globe.

THE DUTCH COLONIES

Until **1581**, the Netherlands existed as a major component of the vast Hapsburg-controlled territories of Spain and the Holy Roman Empire. In that year, the Protestant Dutch declared their independence from Spain, resulting in a series of violent conflicts. Many of these skirmishes took place at sea, prompting the Dutch to develop their naval efforts.

Exploration seemed a natural extension of this, and in **1624** the Dutch led a major expedition into what is today New York State. Establishing themselves on the Hudson, Connecticut, and Delaware rivers proved profitable, and so in the following year (**1625**), a second group of colonists founded a permanent settlement on Manhattan Island. They named this major colony **New Amsterdam**, though it was later renamed New York by the English. The Dutch developed a strong trading relationship with the Iroquois, who were happy to ally themselves with a rival of the French. This caused tension with the nearby Algonquins, who were already concerned about the Dutch incursions into their hunting grounds.

Throughout this process, the English, French, and Dutch had surprisingly few feuds between them, despite the intense rivalry they shared. All had powerful navies and merchant fleets — especially after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Some minor difficulties did surface between the English and the Dutch; in 1664, the English king Charles II sent warships to New Amsterdam claiming the colony truly belonged to the English. Not wanting a war with England, the Dutch backed down, surrendering their North American holdings. From that point, the Dutch would focus in on their colonies in Suriname, South Africa, and Indonesia (later known as the Spice Islands or the "Dutch East Indies").

As the influence of Spain and Portugal rapidly decreased, new European powers were quickly building up their strength in both Europe and abroad. These new powers — particularly France and England — would begin to take center stage. As conflicts like the 30-Years War began to consume the Holy Roman Empire, a dramatic power shift began to occur. England and France suddenly found themselves in new positions of power in both Europe and abroad.

WORLD: The First Global World

Unit 4.2: AN AGE OF DISCOVERY

4.2.05



Important Stuff:

- What are two positive and two negative effects of the Columbian Exchange?
- How did a "Trading Post Empire" function? Why was this a preferred method in places like South and Southeast Asia?
- What impacts were made by the Age of Discovery as a whole?

By the end of the 16th century, the world had stumbled into its first truly global age. For the first time in history, the Old World and the New were regularly interacting. Through both trade and war, cultures began to diffuse at a remarkable rate. As intrepid explorers pushed deeper into the unknown, the known world grew rapidly. New systems of power rose and fell while cultures around the world were forced to adapt or be eliminated. The events of this period had a profound effect on not only Europe and the Americas, but on cultures around the globe.

The Columbian Exchange

Before the discovery of Columbus, the Americas had been separated from Afro-Eurasia for thousands of years. This lengthy division allowed local species of plants and animals, as well as local populations of humans and even diseases, to develop and evolve in unique directions. Certain species — many of them essential to human development — were found only on one hemisphere of the globe. Local diets,

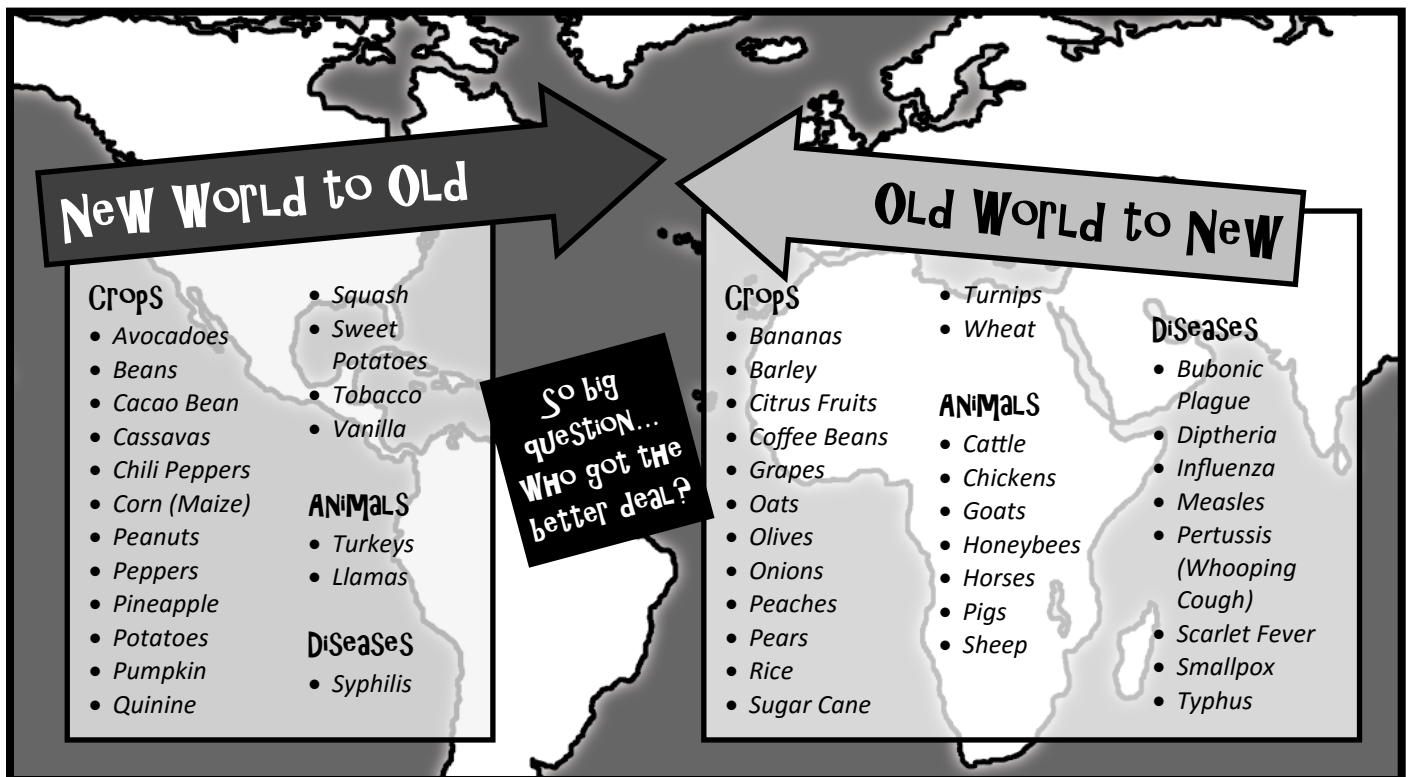
cultures, and disease resistances all developed to reflect the organisms found throughout the local environment.

"Ride Like the Wind, Giant Deer Beast!"

Horses were domesticated by humans from smaller species found only in Eurasia, so horses simply did not exist in the New World prior to Columbus's arrival. You can imagine how terrifying this would have been to the natives upon seeing one for the first time... "What is this giant deer that listens to the commands of men? I can't get my llamas to do anything..."

As the world finally came together in the 15th and 16th centuries, so too did the organisms of the two opposing hemispheres. European settlers brought with them their livestock and foodstuffs and returned with the exotic foods and spices of the New World. As settlements and colonies were established, wide-scale trading facilitated a far grander exchange of these plants and animals. In time, dozens of species began to be spread across the Atlantic, resulting in a mixing of species known to historians as the Columbian Exchange.

The results of the Columbian Exchange were far-reaching. In the Old World, general nutrition vastly improved with a new variety of crops. Species like the potato revolutionized the diets of many European areas, while maize and sweet potatoes found popularity in China and Africa. Tobacco became a highly-valued product throughout Eurasia. This newfound desire furthered the establishment of European



colonies meant to grow and harvest this cash crop. Though New World cultures were largely uninterested in the crops of Afro-Eurasia, Old World livestock was warmly accepted. In the Great Plains region of North America, the introduction of the horse revolutionized the culture of local tribes.

The Not-So Sweet World of Sugar Production

Many Old World products were found to grow exceedingly well in New World environments. Sugarcane in particular flourished in the fertile soils and warm climate of Central America and the Caribbean. As European influence in those regions grew exponentially, many settlements developed to facilitate the sugar industry. Given the difficult and intensive nature of the process, sugar plantations required huge numbers of workers. As native populations declined with disease, African slaves were often brought in. Conditions were extreme, and the Africans were frequently abused. The methodical process of sugar-making helped establish some of the first factory set-ups, but at a heavy cost. These methods would become a major deal with the later development of the Industrial Revolution.

But the Columbian Exchange had a darker side as well. With the exchange of peoples and goods came the spread of disease. Viruses and bacteria unknown to the New World was suddenly unleashed in force, devastating local populations. In some cases, disease outbreaks predated European arrival, spreading even faster than invading armies could move. Smallpox was undoubtedly the most deadly, but diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis also took their toll. Within 50 years of Columbus's arrival, the native populations of the New World had fallen by as much as 90%.

Yeah, I have that problem With Money, too...

Living things weren't the only goods to be shipped across the Atlantic. One of the major driving forces of trade during this time was the exportation of silver from the New World. Mexico and the Andes region — both controlled by the Spanish — were known to be rich in silver mines. This silver was highly valued in Europe, especially considering it was even more valued in China. European states wanting to trade with the East often needed American silver to do it. This vast amount of silver should have made Spain ridiculously wealthy, and it did — at least for a little while. As quickly as Spain gained this wealth, it spent it. Massive armies, navies, and colonial settlements aren't cheap, after all. This boom-and-bust spending was a major factor in why the Spanish Empire so quickly peaked and fell apart...

The Trading Post Empires

Despite the extensive drama that surrounded the New World's discovery and colonization, it was not the only concern of European opportunists in the Age of Exploration. Though a great deal of interest had shifted to the Atlantic and the new sources of wealth that lay beyond it, European states still found themselves concerned with their original goal of a passage to India and China.

With the successful voyages of Vasco Da Gama in the late 1400's, the Portuguese led the process of trade in the Indian Ocean. Da Gama's first voyage had yielded a 6000% return on his initial investment, prompting a flood of future ventures. The Portuguese established a strong system of trade in India and Indonesia, which soon piqued the interest of other European states.

In South and Southeast Asia, European merchants tended to operate under very different rules than they had in the Americas. As Asia was already developed under established and powerful states, European powers tended to look for opportunities to control trade lanes rather than outright conquer tracts of territory. Most often this was done through the establishment of fortified **trading posts** (or sites used for the exchange of goods), especially around the Indian Ocean. From these sites, European powers could more readily interact and trade with foreign economies. As trading posts became more successful, they would often force merchant vessels to both trade and pay extravagant duties to the controlling powers. While the Americas became dominated by more traditional land-based empires, the Indian Ocean was fast becoming the site of European **Trading-Post Empires**, built with the intention of controlling local economies. Such powers dominated trade along the coastal regions of India, West Africa, Southeast Asia, and even as far as China.

Though the Portuguese had worked to establish this system, they would not enjoy it for long. Trading ports like **Gao**, **Malacca**, and **Sri Lanka** had been exceedingly profitable (along with roughly 50 others around the region), but Portugal itself was too small to maintain such a vast seaborne empire. Its trading posts in India were quickly dominated by the French and English, while their holdings in Indonesia were taken by the Dutch. In **1652**, Dutch settlers established **Cape Colony** in what is today South Africa. This port was a valuable location for the rest and re-supply of Dutch ships on their way to Indonesia, and helped to strengthened Dutch control of Southeast Asia. With the exception of Brazil and a handful of smaller colonies, Portuguese influence had sharply diminished by the end of the 17th century.

The Impact of the Age of Discovery

As a whole, the Age of Discovery dramatically reshaped the history of the globe. The empires and peoples of the New World had been catastrophically devastated, their way of life altogether wiped out and replaced by European settlers. European states saw great success during the time, maneuvering themselves into a position as undisputed rulers of an increasingly-global economy. Competition between European powers increased greatly, but this only fueled the advance of economic and technological progress. Such wealth came with a high moral price; for centuries to come, Europe's place in the world would be marked by brutal conquest and oppressive imperialism. Many regions of the world would remain under European control for hundreds of years, and even more regions would eventually fall to this fate. As European control increased, the ancient civilizations of India, China, and the Middle East were notably eclipsed. Though once masters of their worlds, each fell into periods of technological and cultural decline which would be difficult to recover from. Europe's grip on world affairs would only tighten in the coming years, leading to a new and unique chapter in world history.

WORLD: The Commercial Revolution

Unit 4.2: AN AGE OF DISCOVERY

4.2.06



Important Stuff:

- What role does the government play in a mercantilist economy? Explain.
- How did the positions of middle-class and noble individuals change with the onset of the Commercial Revolution?
- How did the Commercial Revolution increase the power of monarchies?

From the 15th to the 18th centuries, the discovery, colonization, and exploitation of the New World — as well as the establishment of trading post empires in Asia — proved revolutionary for the economies of Europe. Within a short period of time, new sources of income would strongly reshape the kingdoms of Europe that had previously depended on the medieval principles of manorialism and feudalism. Though some historians would argue the trend began even before the 15th century, the **Commercial Revolution** — a period of great European economic expansion — would be essential to establishing Europe as the masters of the new modern world. Much like the Neolithic Revolution thousands of years before, the Commercial Revolution was less of a singular event and more of a general trend among numerous European states. Wherever it went, it was marked by dramatic increases in trade and commercial activity, improving the wealth and overall economic strength of a given economy.

Marvelous Mercantilism

A major component of these economic shifts was a dependency on the economic philosophy of mercantilism. **Mercantilism** was an economic theory whereby colonies were founded and maintained for the benefit of the mother country. Furthermore,

A Few Things to Keep in Mind...

As we jump into all this economic-y stuff, it's important to keep in mind the trends we've already seen in trade. Remember that during the classical period (i.e. Rome) and then again after the Crusades, the focus of European trade had always been on the Mediterranean Sea. At the beginning of the Renaissance period (1400's), Italy was in a really strong economic position, mostly because of its position in the middle of all of this. As we move to the 1500's, this begins to shift. Trade will focus more on Trans-Atlantic routes — less on the Mediterranean. This will be a huge blow to Italy, but also regions like the Ottoman Empire (we'll see them in the next subunit), who had risen to power by using Mediterranean trade as an economic base. Germany — or at least, the Holy Roman Empire — would have a similar problem as its Hansa was overshadowed by Atlantic trade. Of course, it's also important to remember that there were major shifts in Trans-Atlantic trade, too. In the 1500's, the Atlantic and its economic interests were dominated by Portugal and Spain. By the 1600's, that focus had shifted to the Netherlands, France, and England. Confusing, I know, but key to understanding how all this went down...

the government had the ability to regulate its own economy with the intent of dominating over rival countries. This could be accomplished through a number of economic tools. Mercantilist countries tended to favor the creation of domestic (national) industries and businesses, and tried to discourage importing goods from other economies (usually by means of **tariffs**, or taxes on imported goods). Ideally, effective mercantilism would enable a country — along with its colonies — to become economically **self-sufficient**, that is, requiring no dependencies and imports from other countries. For many mercantilist theorists, the government was able to be just as active in economic affairs as it was in political matters — especially when it came to achieving this goal.



More Colonies = More Money

You don't just build a colony for fun. You build it for money. The reason why European colonies — and trading posts, for that matter — were popping up all throughout the 16th and 17th centuries was first and foremost because of the dominance of Mercantilism in the minds of European leaders. More colonies meant more resources. More resources meant more products. More products meant more trade. More trade meant more money. More money meant bigger, stronger, wealthier governments... You get the idea.

Changes For the Middle Class

While the Commercial Revolution enhanced the role of government, its effects would also impact the lives of ordinary individuals. In the early decades of the New World's colonization, Spain was responsible for im-



porting thousands of tons of gold and silver from its holdings in Central and South America. Once in Europe, these precious metals were minted into coins and added to the overall money supply. While seemingly-advantageous, this actually caused a temporary problem in Europe. Though the supply of money had increased heavily, the overall productive capacity — that is, the ability to produce goods — had remained the same. This resulted in a condition known as **inflation**, where too much money in an economic system decreases the value of goods.

How Much are We talkin'?

Records indicate the Spanish imported around 200 tons of gold and thousands of tons of silver. That's a lot...

How can too much money be a bad thing?

While "too much money" is a problem we'd all like to have, it's not so good on a national level. Think about it this way: A company just developed an amazing new smart phone that everybody wants. Catch is, they've only produced 500 of them. What are these going to cost? A lot, right? But why? Well they're limited, so they have more value. Now what happens if that same company makes several billion of those phones. Will they be worth as much? Not at all — They'll lose their value. Same thing with money. If there's a limited supply of it, it will have greater value. If there's way too much of it, it will lose value and not be able to buy as much. What once could buy you a full meal might now only buy you a loaf of bread. Every once in a while people often ask "Well if the economy is bad, why don't we just print more money?" There's your answer: Because inflation would make sure that "just printing money" wouldn't work. More money is only a good thing if there are more goods being made to spend it on.

In Europe, this problem prompted a condition known as **inflation-stimulated production**, where craftsmen, merchants, and manufacturers were receiving significantly higher amounts of money for their products. Though at the time the money was less valuable, it would allow these middle-class individuals to build up significant wealth through trading and production. As the inflationary conditions improved, these middle-class populations would retain their newfound wealth and improve their social and political influence. Most historians and economists refer to this developing middle class as the **bourgeoisie**, a French term which references the increasing status of these individuals. In the coming decades, these bourgeois populations would begin to radically shift the economic and political direction of their countries.

But... We Still Have dirt, right?

Inflationary conditions actually hurt Europe's noble classes. Often dependent on age-old family wealth, the nobility wasn't as likely to be receiving an income from... you know... work. They were sort of just mooching off of past glories (and the income of others). That might have been fine (I mean, it had worked for hundreds of years), had it not been for the fact that their money was quickly losing its value. The nobles did have a lot of land (which of course was given to them by higher nobles and blah, blah... Feudalism), but thanks to the Commercial Revolution, well... nobody cared. Land was still important (you needed land to do other stuff), but the economy had shifted to a focus on money. Money was what you wanted to make it in the world, and many old-school nobles never really got that. Though some would catch on and continue to influence Europe for the next several centuries, the increasing power of the bourgeoisie and more-centralized governments was sort of a one-two punch for the noble classes...

As the economies of Europe re-stabilized, the middle classes found themselves in the possession of far more

wealth than ever before. Shrewd individuals were quick to realize they had significant **capital**, or money to be used as an investment. Capital could be used to establish businesses or invest in larger projects, all with the goal of earning even greater profit. By the 17th century, most bourgeoisie had accumulated enough wealth to both maintain a high standard of living and invest portions as well.

An attitude of investing money to gain even greater returns became popular, leading to a number of new types of companies. One of the most prevalent were **joint-stock companies**, or businesses who would sell shares of **stock** — or portions of their company — to private investors. While this would raise significant start-up money for the company, it provided a safe and often-valuable opportunity for the investor. If a company did well, the stockholder would receive a return on their investment. If the company did poorly, the stockholder would only lose as much as he had originally invested. Such setups eventually gave rise to modern-day corporations, which operate on similar principles. Many joint-stock companies were also **chartered companies**, possessing a monopoly of trading rights within a certain area. In keeping with mercantilism, charters could only be issued directly by a country's monarch, and leaders themselves often had a vested interest in the success of national businesses. The Virginia Company which founded some of the first English colonies in the New World was one such joint-stock company that gained significant wealth for its investors.

Effects of the Commercial Revolution

The many economic changes of the Commercial Revolution meant massive changes for European governments. As the primary benefactors of mercantile theory, European governments were able to harvest much larger tax revenues than they had in previous centuries. Raw materials from colonies fueled manufacture at home, and allowed for the production of goods to be traded in regions like Africa and Asia. This allowed for many countries to establish a favorable balance of trade, where exports outweighed imports and led to vast profits for the country.

This new wealth allowed for a general strengthening of centralized governments, with monarchs often yielding the greatest benefits. As noble wealth plummeted, the kings of Europe were better able to bring them under control, ending any remnants of medieval feudal structure. Feudal warriors were replaced by powerful standing armies of professional soldiers used for protecting the state and the expansion of its borders and interests. Governments often provided sizeable **subsidies**, or grants of money, to industries essential to the economy. In many areas, this helped to establish products unique to the nation, and therefore valuable for trade. As governments continued to support mercantilist theory, the cycle of investment and expansion grew in a cyclical pattern, ultimately securing Europe's position in world affairs.

AFRICA: The Decline of Africa

Unit 4.2: AN AGE OF DISCOVERY

4.2.07



Important Stuff:

- How does Songhai compare to previous West African kingdoms (Ghana, Mali)?
- What similarities and differences exist between Songhai and Kongo?
- Do you think major African kingdoms could have continued had it not been for European influence? Explain.

As European states busied themselves with the colonization of the New World and the establishment of trading empires in the Far East, it was only a matter of time before Africa's own way of life would be subject to imperial pressures from Europe. Though often depicted by Europeans as desolate and uncivilized, Africa was home to dozens of powerful states and countless cultures. As Europeans turned their attention to Africa's sizeable wealth and resources, the people of Africa's diverse regions would be subject to inevitable change.

The Empire of Songhai

The largest and most powerful of the African states in the 15th and 16-centuries was the **Songhai Empire** (alternatively spelled Songhay), a large state that stretched over a vast portion of West Africa. Formed in the waning days of the Mali Empire, Songhai served as the successor to the powerful West African states of Ghana and Mali. As Mali crumbled, the Songhai people — centered in the city of Gao — took advantage of this weakened state and took over vast portions of territory for themselves. In **1464**,

under the leader **Sonni Ali**, Songhai became consolidated as a powerful new empire with its capital at **Gao**.

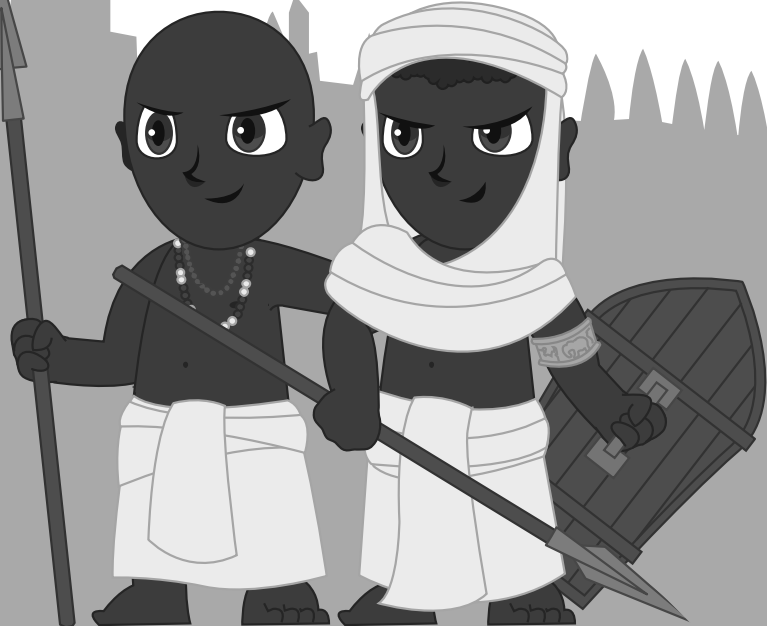
As the first of the **askia**, or emperors, of his people, Sonni Ali made great improvements to his empire. He divided the empire into efficient provinces and built a more modernized army to continue a bold policy of expansion. These armies helped to press out the **Berbers**, a collection of tribes that descended from Arabic peoples in the north. He also formed the basis of a naval fleet to patrol the Niger River and led his armies in the capture of key cities like Timbuktu and Djenné. By his death in 1492, his newfound empire was larger and more powerful than Mali had ever been.

Despite his power, the rule of Sonni Ali was not always popular. For centuries, the West African world had strongly embraced Islam, but records indicate that Sonni Ali himself may have also embraced more traditional forms of paganism. While this multi-culturalism had been tolerated in years past, its acceptability had finally been called into question by more devout Muslim leaders. His questionable beliefs, as well as his general cruelty toward the people of conquered cities like Timbuktu, have tended to tarnish an otherwise impressive legacy.

Lemme ASKia a Question...

*Sonni Ali was succeeded by his son, Sonni Baru (r.1492-1493), who proved to be less than capable. After only a few months of rule, Sonni Baru was overthrown by one of his father's powerful generals, **Mohammad I** (no relation to The Prophet), who rose to power simply by claiming that Sonni Baru was not a faithful Muslim (He was probably right; according to some sources, Sonni Baru refused to practice Islam). Despite this potentially sketchy start, Mohammad proved himself to be an incredible leader. He greatly reformed the government, affirmed the role of Islam within his government and among his people, and extended the borders of the empire to their greatest extent. Under him, Songhai would take its place as the largest African Empire in history. Perhaps it's not a wonder that Mohammad I is often referred to as **Askia the Great** (r. 1493-1538), and is generally seen as the greatest of the leaders of Songhai.*

Like the people of Ghana and Mali, Songhai benefitted heavily from the system of Trans-Saharan trade. Dozens of caravan routes collected in Gao, making it an essential city of trade and influence. Salt, textiles, and metal weapons and tools continued to flow from merchants in the Middle East, while vast supplies of gold and slaves stemmed from Songhai. Gold mining continued to form the basis of the West African economy much as it



had for hundred of years before. Such wealth allowed cities like Timbuktu to continue to support great numbers of scholars, educators, and artisans — at least for a time.

Following the death of Askia the Great, the empire's greatest ruler, the empire fell into decline. Successive leaders engaged in brutal civil wars and uprisings, resulting in widespread chaos throughout the empire. Recognizing the empire's weakness and its potential for riches, its rivals began to take note by the end of the 16th century. In **1591**, an invading army from Morocco in the north crushed the forces of Songhai. Actively engaged in Mediterranean trade and in diplomacy with the Ottomans to the east, the Moroccans had a well-built army that effectively employed the use of gunpowder weaponry. The army of Songhai — having no gunpowder weapons — was easily crushed. Almost instantly, the empire crumbled. As the state fragmented into dozens of smaller kingdoms, European interests — particularly those of the Portuguese — quickly gained hold of the region.

The Empire of Benin

As early as the 11th century, another kingdom developed around the city of **Edo** in modern-day Nigeria. Over time, the founders of the city — known as the **Edo people** to historians — developed their tiny, forested region into a wealthy kingdom, remembered as the **Empire of Benin**. Originating as a city-state, Benin was led by kings known as **Oba**. Rarely driven by conquest, Benin developed an imperial system whereby it protected nearby areas in exchange for resources and taxation. Under Oba **Ewuare the Great** (r. 1440-1473), this system blossomed into a sophisticated empire with well-developed urban areas and an army of tens of thousands. Though the introduction of gunpowder weapons made them an even more formidable force, the devastating changes brought about by the Trans-Atlantic slave trade would cripple the region, forcing it into decline.

The Yoruba People

A neighbor of the Empire of Benin was the **Kingdom of Ile-Ife**, which existed further to the west though still in modern-day Nigeria. This tiny kingdom developed out of a culture remembered as the **Yoruba**, who early on had discovered the advantage of iron metallurgy and terra-cotta pottery.

Predominantly simple farmers, the Yoruba organized themselves into a loose collection of city-states. Though small, the region was highly influential, leading to a Golden Age of achievement and prosperity. Though eventually collected under the locally-controlled **Oyo Empire**, the Yoruba culture would eventually fall into the same decline as many West African cultures, a fate driven largely by the beginnings of the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade.

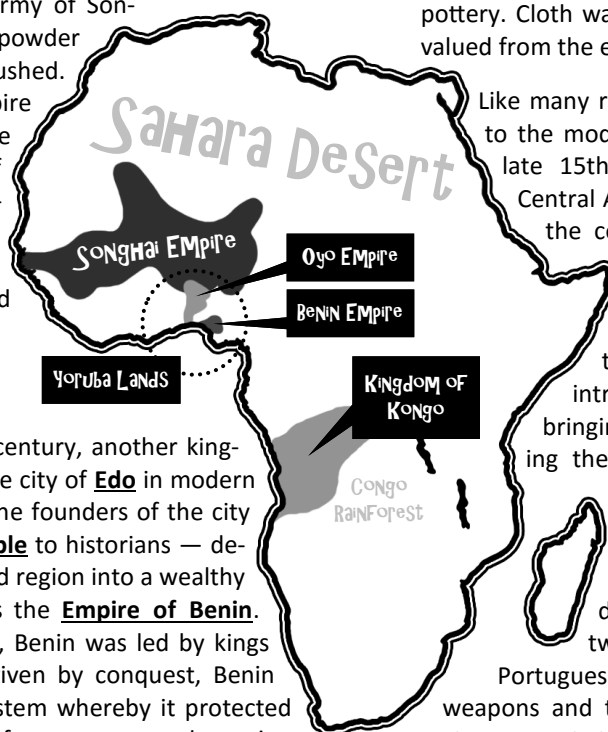
The Kingdom of Kongo

Just as the Empire of Songhai was beginning to form, another state was taking root to the south. In Central Africa, the **Kingdom of Kongo** developed by **1391** from a collection of smaller states. Situated at the lower portion of the Congo River, the state depended heavily on agriculture in the fertile soils. Its major capital, **Mbanza Kongo**, may have been home to as many as 100,000 people in its day, despite its proximity to the nearby Congo Rainforest. Ruled by a powerful hereditary monarchy, Kongo was led by a **Manikongo**, or local king. Like its neighbors to the north, Kongo participated heavily in regional trade. Though focused primarily on agriculture, the Kongo people traded in ivory, copper goods, iron, and pottery. Cloth was also a major export, and was particularly valued from the easternmost regions of the kingdom.

Like many regions of the world, Kongo was introduced to the modern world by Portuguese outsiders. By the late 15th-century, Portugal was actively exploring Central Africa in the hopes of finding a route around the continent to the East. In **1482**, Portuguese explorer **Diogo Cão** became the first European explorer to sail up the Congo River and into the Kongo region. Earning the trust of the local king, Nzinga a Nkuwu, Cão introduced Christianity to the region, later bringing a number of Catholic priests and baptizing the local leadership. Within several years, a number of the lower classes had converted as well.

This trust and mutual faith led to strong diplomatic and economic ties between the two regions, and trade greatly increased. The Portuguese sought after gold and ivory and offered weapons and textiles in return. As time progressed, the main economic interest of the Portuguese shifted to slaves, and local leaders began to cooperate in slave raids in exchange for weapons. The Portuguese heavily interfered in local politics to secure the trade, grossly undermining the king's authority. By the 1660's, the Kongo leaders allied themselves with the Dutch in an attempt to reaffirm their position, but were crushed by the Portuguese. As time progressed, European interests would continue to seep into the region and civil wars would tear the country apart.

Despite the great success of all of these African states, each would fall victim to a similar fate. As European economic interests trickled into the continent, each of these major states would inevitably fall. While Portuguese explorers had once bypassed the region on their way to greater riches, European merchants now realized a great opportunity was presenting itself much closer to home. Collaborating with local leaders, Europe was about to unleash one of the greatest human tragedies in history: The African slave trade.



AFRICA: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

Unit 4.2: AN AGE OF DISCOVERY

4.2.08



Important Stuff:

- How was the traditional African system of slavery different from later varieties?
- Why were African slaves so valued in New World industries?
- What was involved in each leg of the "Triangle Trade" across the Atlantic?

As Portuguese explorers searched for a passage to the east, they stumbled upon a multitude of African cultures who had much to offer European markets. Benefitting from the trade of gold, ivory, and spices was not enough, though. As Portuguese interests increased in the region, so did their interest in Africa's people. As European colonization of the New World increased, an unprecedented slave industry would also develop, leading to one of the more tragic chapters in the Age of Discovery.

African Slavery

The notion of slavery was not unknown to Africans before European involvement. Systems of forced labor had existed in Africa for centuries in most regions. African governments regularly enslaved criminals, debtors, and prisoners of war. Control of human labor — not wealth or gold — was often the highest display of status. African slaves were a common commodity on the Silk Road, even in classical times. Merchants regularly bought and sold African slaves, especially in Muslim-controlled North Africa. There, slaves could be shipped as far away as Arabia, Persia, or even India. The system was somewhat different than more modern interpretations: Owners of slaves would sometimes adopt their slaves, and some slaves were given the opportunity to earn their own freedom over time. Once freed, a former slave had all the rights and abilities as someone who had gone their whole lives in freedom. Slaves were always expected to work hard, but this often meant working alongside one's master doing the same task. For the most part, the system lacked the barbarity and inhumanity that would later plague it.

Whoa, Whoa, Whoa...

Don't get me wrong, here. The slavery system — even as it existed in native Africa, was never a "nice" system. It was, however, less likely to suffer the brutal abuses it would see later in history, once Europeans (and eventually Americans) got involved. Slaves were treated with a bit more dignity and respect. Keep in mind, too, that slavery has almost always existed within human civilizations in almost every region. It's certainly not anything new.

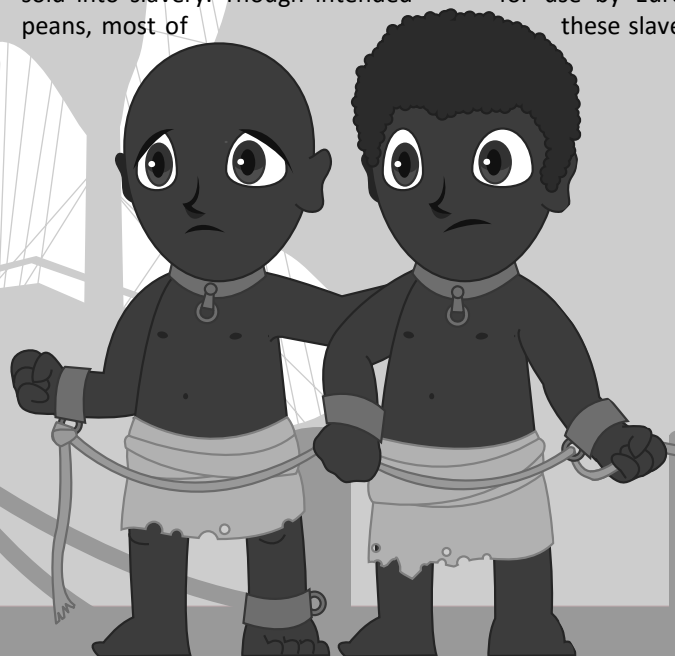
The Trade Begins

As European influence expanded across the globe, the need for a cheap source of labor was essential to most. Slavery seemed like the most logical solution; After all, slavery

required no wages, and was often significantly cheaper for the land-owners themselves. By employing systems of slavery, Europeans could quickly establish successful plantations and mines in the New World and benefit heavily from their investment. As native empires fell, surviving locals were gathered up by opportunistic Europeans and sent to work, leading to systems of *encomienda* throughout the Spanish and Portuguese worlds. But the establishment of systems of the labor in the New World faced a significant problem in its early years: Native workers were unable to withstand the brutality of European diseases. More than 90% of the natives had died within a few decades, and many reformers like Bartolome de Las Casas spoke out strongly against the use and abuse of native labor.

The decision to resort to African slaves as a replacement was an easy one. Portuguese exploration had yielded contact with a variety of African kingdoms. Many of them were eager to trade, and some had even converted to Christianity in an effort to better interact with European interests. Africans were often used to hot and humid climates, which often resembled the tropical nature of the Caribbean islands and Mesoamerica where most would be sent. Most importantly, African slaves — like the Europeans themselves — were far more resistant to Old World diseases. While smallpox, malaria, and typhus were ravaging populations of Native Americans, the Africans would prove far more resilient.

From the 17th to 19th centuries, an estimated 15 million individuals — mostly men — were captured in West Africa and sold into slavery. Though intended for use by Europeans, most of these slaves



were captured by fellow Africans and then sold to the major trading powers. The cooperation of local leaders was essential for the system to work, since Africans themselves would push into the interior, raid villages, and then return to the coast with their merchandise. Though the Portuguese tended to control some of the first and largest slave-trading areas along the coast, the Dutch, French, and English would all claim trading posts of their own.

The High Cost of Sugar

...And I'm not just talking about those calories. Slaves were particularly needed in the Caribbean, or "West Indies." Labor-intensive cash crops like Tobacco and cotton were particularly needy, but the sugar industry demanded the greatest number of workers. At sugar plantations, sugar cane had to be farmed and harvested, then boiled into syrup and processed into sugar. The whole system was long and tedious, and required many hours of brutal labor. In the 16th and 17th centuries, every piece of this process was carried out by slave labor. But as native workers died out, the question remained: Who's going to do the work?

Triangular Trade

By the early 1700's, the trans-Atlantic (across the Atlantic) slave trade had begun to perfect itself, establishing efficient and cost-effective means of shipping slaves and other goods across the ocean. The most famous examples of this was the system of Triangular Trade, a system of trans-Atlantic routes that connected Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Ships from the colonies would transport raw materials — such as lumber, furs, cotton, tobacco, etc. — to the parent countries in Europe. There, they would be used for manufacturing and produce essential trade goods. These manufactured goods would then be sent to Africa, where they would be traded for new slaves. These slaves would then be sent to the New World colonies, where they would help to harvest more resources and perpetuate the trade cycle.

ALL about the Sugar and Booze...

By the mid-1700's, a more specific system of "Triangular Trade" existed specifically for the British-controlled 13 Colonies. More developed by this time, the British colonies had developed industries of their own, which was reflected in the new system. North American colonies would ship their own goods — particularly rum — to Africa, where they would be used to buy new slaves. These slaves would then be sent to the Caribbean, where they would be used to obtain sugar-based molasses. This would then be sent north to the colonies, where it would be used to produce more rum.

The worst leg of the journey was undoubtedly the 4-6 week trip from Africa to the New World, often referred to as the Middle Passage. This voyage across the Atlantic was often fatal for new slaves. Most historians estimate that of the 15 million Africans taken from their homelands, only 10 million actually made it to plantations in the New World. Chained below the decks of slave ships, most slaves were packed into spaces too small to even stand upright. With little to eat and poor sanitation, many would die of starvation and disease. Once in the New World, slaves were sold in public marketplaces like livestock.

The Effects of the Slave System

Once sent to work on a plantation, the lives of native Africans did not improve. Slaves were often physically and mentally abused, with beatings, rapes, and poor living and working conditions common through both North and South America. Traders often made it a point to separate members of the same tribe, village, and especially family, since any sense of community or unity might lead to organized revolts against plantation owners. This, intentionally or not, led to the destruction of a captive African's language, customs, and religion. Remnants of such cultural traditions would often diffuse with other walks of life to great syncretic cultures like voudon (often more commonly known as voodoo). Present in many Caribbean areas, voudon combined African, Native American, and Christian beliefs and customs.

As the slave trade reached a climax, it brought terrible destruction to West Africa. The immense loss of young, healthy individuals devastated many African regions, shifting demographics and crippling the possibility of healthy future generations. West Africans came to depend on the products brought to them by Europeans — especially weaponry. As these dependencies increased, so too did the role of the European powers themselves. Each of the great African states quickly declined. West Africa had become as much of a European colony as the New World, though the awareness of this fact would have been missed (or ignored) by most.

By the mid 18th-century, European interests had crippled the kingdoms of Africa and established a worldwide system of brutal slavery. Africa's history had been dramatically changed, with even the most powerful regions now subject to European demands. As Europe's power would continue to solidify, its demands on Africa — and the overall global economy — would only intensify. The world was undoubtedly in Europe's grasp, and many once-great regions would find themselves in a world they barely recognized.

