Europeans and Africans Reach the Americas

(1) CHAPTER OUTLINE

Between 1492 to 1504 we see people like Estevan and Alvar Cabeza de Vaca brought together from three previously unconnected continents. This chapter examines the Columbian voyages, the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors and their conquest of Mesoamerica and the southern regions of North America. A central theme is the exchange of goods and cultures between Europe, Africa, and the Americas that begin to create the modern world.

Breaching the Atlantic
The Columbian Voyages
Religious Conflict During the Era of Reconnaissance

The Spanish Conquest of America
Caribbean Experiments
The Conquistadors’ Onslaught at Tenochtitlan
The Great Dying
The Columbian Exchange
Silver, Sugar, and Their Consequences
Spain’s Northern Frontier

England Looks West
England Challenges Spain
The Westward Fever
Anticipating North America

African Bondage
The Slave Trade
The Middle Passage
Slavery in Early Spanish Colonies

Conclusion: Converging Worlds
(2) SIGNIFICANT THEMES AND HIGHLIGHTS

1. The clash of three cultures from three continents—the Americas, Europe, and Africa—forms the opening chapter of American history and is therefore the opening chapter of the textbook.

2. A secondary clash within the European white world, that between Catholic Spain and Protestant England, explains the different development of Spanish Central and South America and English North America.

3. By taking readers inside the cultural beliefs and experiences of Native Americans and Africans, as well as Europeans, this chapter serves to counteract the traditional ethnocentric view that sees all developments through the eyes of Europeans. An example of this is the oft-repeated phrase “Columbus discovered America,” implying that there was no life or culture in the Americas until a European found it in 1492.

(3) LEARNING GOALS

Familiarity with Basic Knowledge

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Explain the political, economic, and religious changes in early modern Europe that led to the exploration and eventual settlement of North America.

2. Locate on a map the names and routes of the most significant Spanish, English, French, and Dutch explorers and conquerors in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

3. Describe the impact of the European conquest of the Americas on the Native American Indian population.

4. Explain the economic impact of exploration on the European continent.

5. Explain African participation in the transatlantic slave trade.

6. Describe the conditions of the Middle Passage.

7. Locate on a map the areas European slave traders carried the majority of enslaved Africans during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.
Practice in Historical Thinking Skills

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Evaluate the outcomes that resulted from the collision between Europe, the Americas, and Africa. What do you think and feel about these outcomes?

2. Compare and contrast the cultures of Spain and England, and their motivations for settling the Americas.

3. Explain the images that Europeans had of the Native American and African populations. How were the realities different from the perceptions?

4. Analyze the Islamic and transatlantic slave trade.

(4) IMPORTANT DATES AND NAMES TO KNOW

1440s    Portuguese begin kidnapping Africans and trading with them for slaves on Africa’s western coast

1460s    Using African labor, sugar plantations in Portuguese Madeira become major exporters

1492    Christopher Columbus lands on Caribbean islands
         Spanish expel Moors (Muslims) and Jews

1493-1504    Columbus makes three additional voyages to the Americas

1493    Spain establishes first colony in Americas on Hispaniola

1494    Treaty of Tordesillas

1497-1585    French and English explore northern part of the Americas

1498    Vasco da Gama reaches India after sailing around Africa

Early 1500s    First Africans reach the Americas with Spanish

1508-1511    Spanish conquistadors subjugate native people on Puerto Rico and Cuba

1513    Portuguese explorers reach China

1517    Luther attacks Catholicism and begins Protestant Reformation

1520    First disease contracted from Spanish conquistadors devastates Aztec people

1521    Cortes conquers the Aztec
1528 Spain establishes first settlement on Florida coast
1528-1536 Cabeza de Vaca *entrada* across southern region of North America
1530s Calvin calls for religious reform
1533 Pizarro conquers the Inca
1534 Church of England established
1540-1542 Coronado explores the Southwest
1558 Elizabeth I crowned Queen of England
1585 English establish settlement of Roanoke Island
1588 English defeats the Spanish Armada
1590 Roanoke settlement fails
1603 James I succeeds Elizabeth I

Other Names to Know

Hernan Cortes  Martin Luther  Queen Elizabeth I
Estevan (Estanvanico)  Treaty of Tordesillas  King Philip II
Vasco de Gama  Francisco Pizarro  Christopher Columbus

(5) GLOSSARY OF IMPORTANT TERMS

**conquistador:** Any of the sixteenth century Spanish conquerors of Mexico, Peru, etc.

**Moors:** Any of a Muslim people living chiefly in Northwest Africa

**Protestant Reformation:** Period in Europe in the sixteenth century of protest against the Roman Catholic church and the creation of new (Protestant) religious institutions

**Columbian Exchange:** Most significant geographical rearrangement of plant and animal life between Europe and the Americas with profound environmental and human consequences.

**Middle Passage:** The journey during the transatlantic slave trade from Africa to the Americas and Europe.

(6) ENRICHMENT IDEAS
1. Imagine that you are an enslaved African, one of the European explorers, or a Native American during the fifteenth and sixteenth century; write a journal entry describing your contact with people of another land and culture. What might be some obstacles in interacting with people of another culture? What might be some positive outcomes of contact?

2. Find an old history textbook that discusses European exploration during the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Compare and contrast the interpretation of the old history textbook with your current one. How do historical interpretations change over time?

3. Pretend that you are a Catholic priest living during the time of the Protestant Reformation. Write a letter to your parishioners explaining some of the difference in doctrine between Protestants and Catholics. How would you respond to some of the criticisms against the Catholic Church? Do a similar exercise from the perspective of a Protestant minister. How would you respond to criticisms against the Protestant Church?

4. Create a poster illustrating the Columbian Exchange. Use the “Analyzing History” inset to guide your project.

5. Imagine yourself a newly enslaved African. Write a letter to people back home explaining how you were acquired and what has happened to your life since your capture.

(7) SAMPLE TEST AND EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Multiple choice: Choose the best answer.

1. In the latter half of the fifteenth century, Christopher Columbus
   a. received financial backing by Prince Henry the Navigator for a westward voyage
   b. overestimated the distance between Europe and Japan
   c. argued that Europeans could reach the Indies by sailing west rather than east
   d. reaped significant fame and riches from his four voyages of exploration

2. According to Martin Luther,
   a. only a chosen few deserved salvation
   b. salvation came through faith in God’s grace
   c. only non-Catholics could ever be saved
   d. salvation was earned through good works

3. The doctrines of Protestant leader John Calvin
   a. offered a system for both self-discipline and social control
   b. emphasized the need for hierarchical church structure
   c. denied hope of salvation to most believers
   d. appealed only to the poorest and most oppressed peoples of Europe

4. The Treaty of Tordesillas divided settlement of the Americas between
   a. Spain and Portugal
   b. Spain and England
   c. Spain and France
   d. France and England
5. The population of the Americas dramatically declined following the arrival of Europeans primarily because of the
   a. enslavement of Native Americans by Europeans
   b. lack of immunity among Native Americans to European diseases
   c. loss of morale and sense of hopelessness that pervaded Native American societies
   d. policy of systematic genocide employed by European explorers toward Native Americans

6. Which of the following pairs is not correct
   a. Pizzaro – Incas        b. Cortes - Aztecs
   c. de Soto – New Mexico and Arizona   d. Ponce de Leon - Florida

7. What percentage (estimated) of the inhabitants of the Americas died of diseases brought by Europeans
   a. 25 percent            b. 65 percent
   c. 75 percent           d. 95 percent

8. Motivation(s) for Spanish settlement included
   a. spread of the Catholic religion
   b. national pride
   c. dreams of personal enrichment
   d. all of the above

9. The massive flow of silver bullion from the Americas to Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries
   a. triggered a century of inflation
   b. delayed further exploration of America
   c. increased prevailing wage rates in Europe
   d. hampered capitalist modes of production

10. The primary enterprise of the Portuguese in Brazil during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries involved the
    a. extraction of silver
    b. enslavement of Native American laborers
    c. conversion of Native Americans to Catholicism
    d. production of sugar

11. Which of the following best describes England’s motivations for moving westward to North America?
    a. the quest for new fisheries
    b. the quest for gold and silver
    c. religious and trading rivalry with Spain
    d. the desire to Christianize heathen Indians

12. The defeat of the Spanish Armada by England in 1588
    a. solidified Catholicism in England
    b. decreased nationalistic spirit in England
    c. increased English interest in overseas exploration and colonization
    d. brought about continued European religious wars
13. Early European images of the “New World”
   a. described an earthly paradise full of riches
   b. depicted friendly native inhabitants
   c. pictured backward, hostile savages
   d. described all of the above

14. English colonizing ventures in the New World differed from prior Spanish and Portuguese efforts in that English attempts were
   a. immediate and major successes
   b. met with little or no Native American resistance
   c. strictly coordinated and governed by the Crown
   d. privately owned and financed

15. The least likely destination of European slave traders in the seventeenth century would have been
   a. the West Indies
   b. Brazil
   c. North America
   d. Spanish America

**Essays**

1. Discuss the various explorers and the areas that they conquered. Examine the process of how these areas were dominated. Discuss the reaction of the Native American and/or the African. What steps, if any, did they take against colonization?

2. Analyze English motivations for exploring and eventually settling the New World. Compare and contrast their motives with those of the Spanish.

3. Evaluate the converging of three worlds—Native American, African, and European—in the Americas. What was gained and what was lost by each of the three?

4. “Neither the Spanish nor the English respected Indian culture and society; this lack of respect enabled them to destroy Native American life with few regrets.” Write an essay supporting or rejecting this statement, selecting appropriate evidence.

5. Explain how the religious changes of the Protestant Reformation affected the English colonization of America.

6. Explain the transatlantic slave trade from acquisition in Africa until their new lives in the Americas. Why do you think the Islamic slave trade in northern Africa has received less attention than the transatlantic slave trade?